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Like our image in a concave mirror, after seemingly receding into infinity, suddenly appears once more close before us, thus natural grace, when consciousness has traversed the infinite, returns to us. For it manifests itself in its purest form, either where there is no consciousness at all, or where consciousness is infinite, that is, in the puppet or the god. HEINRICH VON KLEIST

NARRATIVE CINEMA IN THE CONCAVE MIRROR by Thomas Elsaesser

REFLECTION & REALITY

What has marked off the modern narrative cinema in Europe during recent years is its degree of self-consciousness— about ways of constructing a cinematic fiction, about the manipulative effects produced in an audience, about the conditions under which images can give a true picture of reality. Fiction films have increasingly turned inward and upon themselves, in ever more tortuous coils, while the whole concept of the self-contained film has been challenged by the at least quantitatively very important number of film-makers who are resorting to a revival of ciné vérité methods and the deliberately artless filming of banal and random events. In a sense, history can be seen to repeat itself ("first as tragedy, then as farce"?): the modern cinema seems to go through all the agonies and uncertainties of European avant-gardism at the beginning of this century, and once again, it becomes difficult to distinguish the intellectually over-refined from the new barbarians.

On the whole, the influx of what one might call cinema theory into practical film-making, impossible to ignore in the work of Godard, Pasolini, Bertolucci, Straub or Rivette indicates a double mutation. It is first of all a tacit admission that the cinema has lost its primary social function of providing mass-entertainment and is looking for a new definition of its role and purpose. Film-makers are turning to the Russian directors of the twenties, in order to discover an alternative tradition. After the American cinema has become the god that failed, Eisenstein and Vertov are being proclaimed as the founding fathers of the modern cinema. Although it is too early yet to pass judgement on the productiveness of the new ideological-theoretical constellation, its impact is undeniable and points to the second aspect of the present crisis: the question of how the current generation of directors has reacted to their, in some instances systematically cultivated cinematic 'literacy', and how their aesthetic *partis pris* are conditioned by attitudes towards the classical narrative cinema—ranging from muted nostalgia to outright rejection.

The Long Shadow of a Tradition

With the intellectual grasp of the medium often preceding any practical experience of film-making, the new literacy in the modes of visual thinking has almost automatically relativized the stylistic means of the classical narrative form and introduced a shift in aesthetic priorities which is giving the director not only a different sense of what the cinema can or ought to do, but also a new image of himself in relation to his work. Partly in the wake of Godard's overwhelming impact on the sensibility of those under thirty attracted to the cinema, film-making in the last decade has unfortunately burdened itself with the entire paranoid ballast of the bourgeois artist in search of self-expression and working under adverse social and economic conditions. On the one side is the film-industry, monopolizing institutional cinema and supplying a shrinking market with products that receive less and less artistic attention, and on the other, there is the daily growing army of independent or amateur film-makers, impatient for a chance to realize their ambitions and ideas, but painfully handcuffed to this industry by the requirements of finance and distribution, and thus involved in an often devious protest-struggle, where an economic impasse is above all felt as artistic frustration, the whole problem being too often rationalized in narrowly aesthetic terms. The primary target of this aesthetic revolt is the narrative fiction film as a form, not least because it depends on comparatively complex skills and often vast resources having to be mobilized, and therefore requires the director to play along with the way the industry is organized.

Perhaps it is this basic insecurity about the cinema's position in the contemporary cultural context that has accentuated the trend towards a supercharged directorial individualism (Fellini, Visconti), and at the same time produced an uncompromisingly hermetic avant-garde.

There is much to be said for the current freedom from enforced cinematic conventions—if only that it allows one to look closer at what exactly it was one has been admiring in the past. On some film-makers also, the opportunity to explore the non-dramatic possibilities of the cinema is not wasted—I am thinking of films like Werner Herzog's extraordinary FATA MORGANA—and there are those who either by consciously utilizing what the dramatic form has to offer, or because their own development has naturally led them in this direction, have effectively transformed the narrative cinema from within and given it, so to speak, the contours of a properly conceptual effort, thus sketching a new role for the cinema as a form of thought.

It is a truism to say that even the most spontaneous and idiosyncratic director necessarily creates his films also out of a fund of received cinematic information. Yet there is a tradition in the European cinema, especially in France, where this received material plays an essential, even dialectical role: once in a while a director appears whose work implicitly incorporates (and at the same time conducts a dialogue with) a way of thinking about the cinema, an awareness of possibilities and limitations inherent in making films, that has to be responded to by a reference to film-history and film-aesthetics in order for it to become fully comprehensible. This crucial figure was, of course, Godard, and his work during the sixties remains the *degré zéro* of the modern cinema.

Far more radically than either neo-realism (as it is generally understood), "cinéma vérité" or the American underground, he broke the mould of the film as a unilinear, homogeneous naturalistic fiction and asserted its freedom to produce an autonomous form of artistic signification, rather than reproduce a conventionally fixed conception of reality. But this break did not occur out of the blue. It was the result of a prolonged and careful study of how these conventions had themselves been created by film-directors in the past—a study, that is, not undertaken by Godard alone, and on which the fertile aesthetic, literary and philosophical ideas of European intellectual history were brought to bear. Once the cinema was considered in this context, it became apparent that whatever the limits of the cinema-fiction established in the image of nineteenth-century realism and naturalist-symbolic drama, Griffith, Stroheim, Murnau and others had discovered and elaborated a dramatic-illusionist idiom infinitely adaptable to the expression of a very subtle moral and aesthetic sensibility. Godard and his friends, in short, realized the possibilities of personal statements through a conventionalized discourse, and they were confirmed in this by studying the flexible narrative diction of directors who had themselves summed up and reflected upon the cinema that preceded them: Dreyer, Renoir, Ophüls and Rossellini are the names which figure prominently—even where unacknowledged—in the consciousness and the subconscious of the modern narrative cinema, and so does Hollywood, in the way it was mediated and intellectualized by the European 'Americans', especially Hitchcock and Lang (the latter two decisive for film-makers such as Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer and Polanski).

Rather than being a stylistic influence, however, the œuvre of the directors mentioned has its relevance today because one finds there the basis on which to measure the aesthetic potential of the narrative-dramatic form, the range and complexity it has achieved so far, in the hands of great artists, and because films like ORDET, VIAGGIO IN ITALIA, LOLA MONTEZ, VERTIGO or LE CAROSSE D'OR carry with them their own critique of the medium, answering conclusively to the question of freedom and manipulation, realism and stylization, contingency and genre. Not least of all, these directors have demonstrated that they understood a crucial fact: there is a 'morality' of the cinema, as there is for all art, and that it requires the film-maker to take his own attitude to the material into the film, as the reflected presence of a vision.

It is with their work (and in each case, as with Godard, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) that the narrative cinema stands and falls—it cannot be judged or condemned by some generalized idea derived from a dissatisfaction with half a dozen impatiently sat-through super-productions. Film-history fortunately provides us with the concrete (though, alas, often inaccessible) examples **for** (as opposed to the best theoretical arguments against) a narrative cinema that is realistic (in the sense of suggesting a totality), thereby being no less poetic and conceptual (it can reason about and evaluate the world which it creates). The implicit challenge contained in this heritage has first to be met before any true claim to modernity can be staked. To refer to a tradition, in the context of Godard, Rivette, Bertolucci, Rohmer or Skoli-

mowski, is to acknowledge their modernity in this sense and to indicate the common focus of self-awareness with regard to the filmic means they choose to deploy. No one could argue that they are imitating pre-existing models. Among the directors of previous generations still working, only Bunuel and Bergman are giving proof of a similar awareness, of what it means to work through their expanding perception of the medium, rather than against it.

The 'Reel World'

One has to remind oneself of how implicit and yet pervasive the conceptual element is in the traditional narrative cinema, in order to see the irony involved in it now being consistently put down as naïvely unreflective. There is always a time when an artistic form reaches its maximum degree of efficient communication, so to speak, after which its subtlety is seen as byzantine, and it is being discared, even if the desire for change among those that follow often heavily outstrips performance. Thus, for instance, the reaction to the narrative cinema has taken three fairly distinct lines, formulated as an attack on its ideology, as a rejection of the discipline imposed by its formal demands, and lastly, it has suffered an invasion from other media—painters, sculptors and writers, denouncing its lack of abstraction, deploring its realism, and anxious to appropriate the cinema, cutting up the presumed corpse to satisfy the avid need for aesthetic experimentation. In other words, the cinema is rapidly becoming an ancillary art—a faithful reflection of its economic decline—and the scapegoat is the narrative form.

In this confusion, despair is only too understandable. What, one wonders, is the reality or truth that the cinema can render? And how was it that it became everything to everybody in such a short time? For if, a little over ten years ago, the self-consciously erudite directors of the *nouvelle vague* took as their main target (in France at least) the seemingly monolithic academicism of the film 'bien fait', which they battered for a time successfully with low budgets, hand-held camera work, improvised scripts and slogans about a new realism, the actual practice of the directors who had any staying power was far more deliberate than the cult of spontaneity led one to assume, and dictated principally by certain, quite advanced ideas about the nature of filmic reality in relation to actual experience. For after all, what they championed was the American film 'bien fait' in which they discovered a physical and emotional realism that they tried to emulate. The 'art' film with its top-heavy literary and pseudo-philosophical pretentions was almost as alien to Godard or Chabrol when they came to make films, as the cinema of Delannoy or Autant-Lara.

Today, especially left-wing film-makers, are again demanding greater cinematic veracity, not of content and feeling this time, but of form—as a precondition for changing the role of the cinema, and making it serve a dialectical vision. The way to achieve this, it has been suggested, is to reconcile the two historical poles of film-making: The documentary and the fiction film are to come together—Lumière and Meliès at last joining hands, as it were, by the grave of Hollywood. If one looks for examples, one finds them notably in France, though in what sense they could be said to supersede the classic dramatic pattern by a new dialectic is more than uncertain. However worthy their aim of producing a new kind of consciousness and making the cinema an instrument of knowledge, the result is (with rare exceptions) pure self-consciousness, unredeemed by the unquestionable seriousness and good intentions of their authors.

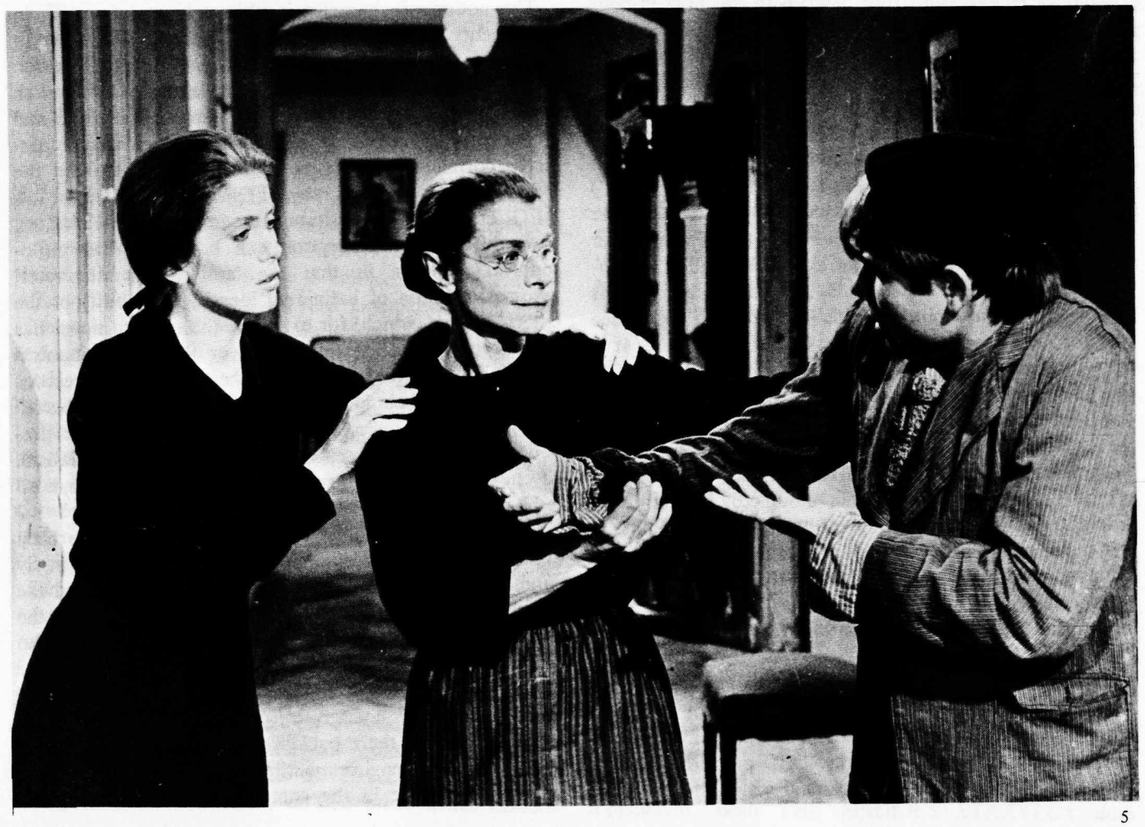
Whereas the documentary, in the form at least in which it has survived on television, endeavours to furnish factual information about the world outside, by surreptitiously structuring its material in such a way as to make a 'story', the new approach to feature films (*le direct* as it has come to be called) does its utmost to suppress or disguise the story that is the basis of its syntax, and to treat its 'fiction' (often starkly symbolic situations) as if it were a documentary, i.e. with a neutrality of emphasis, a distance, an absence of visual rhythm or narrative momentum which gives the images what one might call a deliberate aura of authentic artificiality.

Le direct, although undoubtedly occasioned in part by the sheer pressure of the American underground having in recent years surfaced and imparted its methods and ideals of unstructured fooling around with a camera to a wide-eyed, serious-minded European audience, has nonetheless a claim towards being a film-historical synthesis of sorts, because in the form in which it is practiced at present, it is accompanied by an intense critical activity. Such a conception and its deliberately primitivist use of the cinema (where it isn't merely the result of inexperience or lack of talent trying to 'get away with it') can only be explained—not as some optimistically assume, because films are finally lifting the various cinematic taboos from the real facts of life, and giving a long-overdue, new look at our society—but by the often very sophisticated and sometimes ignorant reaction to the cinematic tradition outlined earlier on—that of the fiction film working with dramatic models of conflict, climax, resolution, etc.

Where the theoretical apparatus advanced to justify *le direct* is impressive, it takes its inspiration from Brecht's dramaturgy, narrowly interpretated (if not wholly misunderstood) as a simple question of changing the relationship of the spectator to the images perceived on the screen by a concerted attack on all the forms of stimulating or sustaining the spectator's interest which are not overtly intellectual (particularly the 'psychological' attraction through curiosity, suspense, fascination, identification, or the conventionally 'aesthetic' ones of the spectacular, of grace or efficacy in movement and gesture, of physical plasticity and sensual presence). The implications, of course, challenge both the notion of 'style' and of '*mise-en-scène*.

This is not the place to go into the well-foundedness of the attack as such (cf. also the article on *Cinema and Politics* in this issue), but the central argument (namely that by having become almost exclusively a dramatic spectacle, the cinema has accepted a limitation of its potential functions which is now being questioned) deserves more serious and vigorous thought than it has hitherto been given. Nonetheless, it ought to be pointed out that *le direct*, far from being direct, is nothing if not devious, and given the fact that it is still caught in its origins of being a

BANDE A PART



TRISTANA

reaction, represents at present an impoverishment of the cinema's proven ability to appeal to the intelligence **and** the senses, to develop an inner dialectic, which one might judge as dangerous to the art as the ideological sins of the dramatized narrative.

Eric Rohmer vs Pasolini

The definition of what constitutes filming *en direct* is, however, by no means clearly drawn, for it seems to comprise the meticulous compositions of a Rivette, the formalism of a Straub, the staginess of a Lajournade, the subjectivist improvisation of a Philippe Garrel, and even Bertolucci's THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY has been included.

In actual fact, however, the options open to a film have sharpened into a straight conflict between the dramatic-narrative directors and those who hold anti-naturalist, 'materialist' theories of film-making. In order to see how the division presents itself in aesthetic terms—leaving aside the more directly ideological argument—one has to turn to the debate which took place in the mid-sixties around certain pronouncements made by Pasolini. At the time, the most outspoken commitment for the 'classical tradition' and the idea that the narrative cinema was still a viable form, came from Eric Rohmer (cf. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 172 "L'ancien et le nouveau"). Though cautious in his assessment of the situation, his basic opinion was nevertheless fairly clear: he thought the demands for radically different modes of cinematic expression were likely to prove a diversionist manœuvre, opening doors that did not lead anywhere.

Rohmer in particular took issue with the now famous distinction which Pasolini drew between a cinema of poetry and one of prose. The somewhat emotively charged nature of the terms created a good deal of confusion, not least due to the idiosyncratic use of the semiologists' vocabulary in the reasoning. In Rohmer's view, the crux of the matter was whether the cinema is being used as an end in itself ("ceux qui prennent le cinéma comme objet") or as a means ("le cinéma comme moyen et le monde comme objet"), and that this has little to do with either poetry or prose. Here one might, nonetheless, add in Pasolini's favour that in the first case, the ultimate reality is the director's consciousness which he seeks to reproduce (the province of poetry), whereas in the latter case, it is the world, social and personal relationships which provide the referential basis (the aim of the realist novel). More decisively, however, Rohmer went on to point out that the question of how the cinema might express a new awareness, was not a problem of changing the grammar of the cinema (as Pasolini had assumed), but rather a difference of rhetoric (i.e. not of trying to manipulate a shot or a sequence as if it were an autonomous unit of meaning, but to control as precisely as possible the expressive-associative power of the images in their 'natural' sequence, through montage, framing and camera-movement). Furthermore, the opposition between absence and presence of the camera in Pasolini's argument seemed to Rohmer something of a red herring, for the fact that what is being filmed is given a spatio-temporal coherence by a camera that tries to efface itself, precludes neither a 'poetic' expression, nor a personal vision.

In contrast, Rohmer's own dichotomy was based on whether the characters function only within the system of reference established by the film itself, or whether they are interesting in their own right and have a life (potentially at least) independent of the director looking at them. He illustrated what he meant by a reference to Godard and Chabrol. "BANDE A PART is an extremely touching film, where Godard moves us: but it isn't the characters who move us, not at all. It's something else. The characters as such, the girl and the two men are only interesting in relation to their place within the film and the rapport which they have to the director. On the other hand, the characters of LES GODELUREAUX interest us, independently of the way in which the director expresses himself and defends his view of the cinema through them. And that hasn't anything to do with either film being less photogenic than the other".

Character and the Liberal Imagination

Rohmer's formulation of a film, continuing, as it were, outside the confines of the screen, restates, of course, the aesthetic position outlined by Bazin. But he also touches on a problem familiar from literature: a novelist who creates 'rounded' characters has a different view of the 'reality status' of the world that his novel depicts than he whose characters function primarily in relation to a central moral or philosophical dilemma, to which all the descriptive material and dramatic scenes are more or less directly tributary. This brings us to the 'modernist' argument, frequently voiced against the narrative tradition.

The notion of character is ultimately as interesting in the cinema as it is in the novel, especially in the way setting and protagonist can be attuned to each other. For example, it is easy to see that a classical director such as Ford or Renoir can create autonomous characters **and** a narrative structure, a dramatic context which perfectly correlates them (one thinks of how closely the different characters in, say, FORT APACHE or LA REGLE DU JEU necessitate and complement each other). Nevertheless, this conception can be queried on philosophical grounds, in that the 'autonomous character' assumes a notion of individual identity, a stability of the external world which, for example, the modern novel has been trying to dispose of: Ford's or Renoir's humanism might be described as one where 'essence precedes existence', i.e. their idea of character as consciousness-in-action is based on a subject-object distinction, on predefined boundaries of self and world, which existentialism, psychoanalysis and Marxism in their different ways all explain as a delusion.

In literature, the liberal concept of 'character' has been attacked since Flaubert and Henry James, to be finally submerged in the stream of consciousness novel and the *nouveau roman*. How did the cinema respond to the challenge? It was—as Rohmer clearly saw—Godard who most radically tried to use the anthropomorphism of the classical style against itself, by presenting in his films protagonists who are not 'given', or defined in their essence by and through their background and their (arbitrarily symbolic) visual environment, but whose identity (rather, whose significance in the context of the film) composes

itself as the film progresses from the often contradictory elements—verbal, pictorial, gestural—which the director (now overtly and often unnaturalistically) accumulates around them. Eddie Constantine quoting Eluard forces both Eluard and Lemmy Caution out of their discrete (cultural) identities, and shots of Anna Karina, Marina Vlady or Juliette Berto framed against a painting, packets of washing powder or posters and book-jackets function less as interpretative clues to their subjective states of mind at a given moment of the action, but as pictorial devices used often contrapuntally to establish meaningful associations **around** the protagonists, instead of presenting a psychologically coherent 'character'. One might say that the Picasso girl or the Renoir painting in PIERROT LE FOU 'look at' Marianne rather like we look at her—detached, ontologically at one remove, but 'interested'. Or one could interpret Godard's use of quotations, pictures, paintings, etc. as attempts to build up a mirror-reality, reflecting images and ideas which bring a social and cultural reality 'into' the film (the real world enters as reflected consciousness), whereas Sirk's or Ophüls' real mirrors reflect an inner reality (relating to the state of consciousness of the characters): within the realistic fiction consciousness projects itself as heightened vision, or dual vision—it is a function of active perception. Godard's free narrative method, on the other hand, enables him to portray a 'negative' essence and denote a passively receptive consciousness in, for example, the heroine of UNE FEMME MARIEE.

Godard's Sounds

The great temptation in this context (and one which Robbe-Grillet, Duras and other writers turned directors have not avoided) is to exploit the ease with which the conceptual coordinates of our sense of identity, namely the uniformity of time and space, can be played out against each other in the cinema. The abiding obsession of modern literature with the reality of consciousness deforming the real world led Resnais to portray a dislocation of consciousness by a juxtaposition of different experiences of time. MARIENBAD today looks very dated, almost archaic, partly I believe, because Resnais misconstrued the nature of the cinematic image: the cinema is a projection of vision, not one of consciousness. It is always in the present, active, and it can only give 'real' images, whereas the written or the spoken word can and does produce 'mental' images.

Different levels of consciousness in the classical cinema are therefore invariably located **within** the realistic image, as a function of space, signalled by shift and variations between the different spatial planes or the architectural structure—mirrors, doors, windows, partitions, etc. A favourite device of Antonioni's, at one time, was to let Monica Vitti's face cut into the frame from the side as a means of suggesting a dissociation of sensibility.

The effects achieved with such variations of foreground and background, or 'superimpositions' of several planes of vision are not unlimited, and Godard must in part be credited for having given a new direction to experiments in projecting complex states of consciousness simultaneously on the screen. His more recent method, taken from Dreyer and Bresson, on the other hand, exploits the different emotional and evocative intensity which is transmitted by words and by images (McLuhan's hot and cool), to establish a dialectical relationship between the association's emanating from the image and those from the spoken text (Eluard's poetry and Eddie Constantine again). But whereas Dreyer and particularly Bresson used the effect 'idealistically' to give (through the seriousness of the text) a spiritual quality, to a drab reality (e.g. DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST), Godard in his 'political' films (the case of Straub is more ambiguous) reverses the process by trying to 'debunk' the image in favour of the word. A neutral image is held in a static shot until it is drained of all significance, creating a vacuum into which the words—usually political speeches—are absorbed, as it were, giving them in the process a novel resonance and dimension. It is a psychological effect, halfway between surrealist collage, concrete art and the mesmerizing, autosuggestive atmosphere created by prolonged monotony. Its didactic, anti-dramatic function, to demonstrate 'false consciousness' has made it a ready recipe, and one of the privileged devices of *le direct*.

What kind of truth—what kind of fiction?

Godard's films have always had a natural buoyancy that lifted them towards abstraction, and they can almost all be seen as attempts to 'think' analytically and yet non-verbally the modalities of filmic meaning as a category apart, and in particular, to examine the process of transformation by which the cinematic image bestows a significance on objects, situations, human acts and gestures, sometimes quite removed from the connotations attached to them in everyday life—in short, the conditions under which a series of images can come to signify an idea, or communicate a feeling. This theoretical focus determined the themes, not the other way round, and the films were often cinematic speculations starting from romantic subjects—love, death, betrayal, and conducted in the iconic vocabulary of ad-mass and pop-art. Their attraction lies in the fact that Godard at once accepted the visual excrescences of modern society, and subverted them by utilizing them as a 'code'—always inadequate of course—to express a heavily romanticised individualist ideology.

What remains ambiguous about them is the kind of truth they expressed. Neither realistic fiction, nor documentary, nor subjective projection, their reference-point was, and remained, that aesthetic *persona*, the poetic self, bodying itself forth as "the raw realism of subjectivity". And since visual code and romantic emotion never coincides, the films agreeably oscillate between pathos and parody—catching exactly the mood of a radicalism without object characteristic of romantic irony.

With his 'political' films Godard has come to represent one extreme of the reaction to a narrative continuity based on psychological motivation and behaviourist realism. It would lead too far to go into them here, but their preoccupation with cinematic truth as a function of the overall structure rather than of detail is shared by other, less ideologically committed directors, who try to validate their fiction by compressing the realistic framework and paring it down, until a different structure of meaning —often, though not always, psychoanalytic—becomes transparent. Both THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY and

Rivette's L'AMOUR FOU have such a dual fiction, where one metaphoric system of reference is articulated by becoming the symbolic language of the other.

Similarly, DEEP END by Skolimowski develops within its narrative a visual symbolism which simultaneously extends the range of the plot and clarifies it. In the end, the symbolic structure appears as a kind of elaborate conceit, unfolding the story by a chain of metaphoric links (the metonymic ideas of water, snow, glass, diamond, steam, melting, all cluster round the basic image of the public bath, as the metaphor of adolescent sexuality), rather than by any strictly psychological development of the characters.

Skolimowski's method recalls the best films of Hitchcock, and the skill with which in DEEP END a 'poetic' discourse is woven into a dramatic-realistic one, shows some of the possibilities that the narrative cinema can explore when attempting to overcome the limitations of a purely psychological approach to character and situation.

Cinema in Huis Clos: Bergman

By contrast, Bergman has become more 'classical' as a director since the mid-sixties and PERSONA, with an increasingly conscious use of anthropomorphic symbolism. This needs a word of explanation: In the European cinema, the idea of a personal style has an obviously different connotation from that in the commercial cinema. As if to compensate for the absence of pre-defined genres, we find directors who—often over a period of decades—have managed to create an instantly recognizable cinematic universe (Bresson, Antonioni, Fellini) into which contemporary social reality enters only in a 'reflected' and at times obliquely 'coded' fashion. Each of these directors seems to be a law to himself, and there is a tendency to either like their films or dislike them, according to how sympathetic one feels towards the underlying general conception of life, rather than to react to the intrinsic artistic qualities of the films as such. More than any other, such a director invites a purely thematic exegesis.

The point to be considered is whether a cinematic vision which bears so obviously the marks of its creator in all its parts is simply self-referential, short-circuited in a tangle of private obsessions and fantasies (as in Fellini's case), or whether the idiosyncracies are the result of a self-imposed limitation, the price of a deliberate artistic discipline. This seems to be particularly true of Bergman. His consistency in theme, character and setting allows him to construct a certain world with exceptional lucidity and to examine a recurrent symbolic situation in depth—and that means in completely realistic detail. Bergman's recent films pose an interesting problem, that of the relationship between his visual language and the judgement he passes on his characters. The increasingly pessimistic, possibly sadistic portrayal of human frailty, of frustrated will to communicate, of remorseless perseverance in moral and psychic self-destruction is, one feels intimately connected with the peculiarly ascetic mise-en-scene, for Bergman's intensity and intellectual lucidity, as well as the calculated control of audience-response is largely due to a categorical refusal to let any reality (in the sense of unstructured contingency) enter into his films—an absence of 'real life', that is, which forms the thematic core of, for example A PASSION. Bergman here 'manipulates' reality so as to produce a symbolic situation, and his particular psychological realism is only effective as a metaphoric language (the predicament points to a larger situation: a society, or social class trapped in forms of behaviour which have become infinitely interpretable, and therefore unreal) because the field of vision has been so carefully delimited and closed.

For example, if one looks at the outbursts of violence in the film, one sees how precise is the relation of what the film says and how (at what price of exclusion) it says it: Max von Sydow swinging an axe at Liv Ullman transcends the level of hysterical histrionics because Bergman's restriction of the visual field, the avoidance of pans and long-shots cumulatively engenders a frustration, a sense of unnatural enclosure in the spectator which finds its lightning-conductor in Sydow's furious physical attack. Emotional intensity viscerally transmitted is one of the secrets of the American cinema's sheer physicality. Only Bergman among European directors manages a similar physical immediacy in his films, for he uses aesthetic processes specific to the cinema (the manipulation of space, e.g.) not to create intellectual effects, but to convey psycho-physiological states (here a sense of claustrophobia) that are integral part of his moral themes. The barrenness of his island is the richness of his cinema.

Bunuel's Tristana

Equally closed to the randomness of ordinary life are the films of Bunuel, though not by an artificially restrictive field of vision, or the atmospheric purity of the setting. Instead, intensity and concentration arise from the peculiarly foreshortened syntax of the scenes, the elliptical narrative (particularly in BELLE DE JOUR, LA VOIE LACTEE, TRISTANA) and the wholly subterranean momentum governing the motivation of the protagonists, which Bunuel never allows to surface. The effect is to cut away the outward trappings of psychological causality and thus suspend momentarily the distinction between the 'real' and the 'imaginary'. The action unfolds in an atmosphere of total ontological fluidity, while remaining squarely within a recognizably real world.

To have achieved this without resorting to subjectivist fantasy, to have avoided 'surrealism' and yet remained absolutely faithful to the surrealist aesthetic with a meticulous behavioural naturalism in gesture and circumstantial detail is the best proof of Bunuel's rare visual sense. In TRISTANA objects stand out in relief, without becoming thereby symbolic: they do not point to anything, they simply are. At the same time, the film communicates or 'signifies' primarily by its visual rhythm. Scenes, and sometimes individual shots are linked, not in view of their verisimilitude within the movement of the plot, but by an audaciously controlled **displacement** of overt logic and continuity, in favour of an inner dynamic. A transference of significance takes place, a force becomes visible beneath the images—whereby the narrative often proceeds by omitting the logically most expected shots, and puzzling the spectator into trying to find the *tertium comparationis*, so as to complete the chain: the real film takes place in the mind of the beholder.

It is a narrative method which ultimately goes back to UN CHIEN ANDALOU, only that in a film like TRISTANA the explicitly psychoanalytical symbols of Bunuel's first work have been abandoned in favour of an imagery integrated into the characters' realistic environment. Bunuel's development in recent years is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the modern cinema, for his realism acts more and more as a kind of decoy, which camouflages another reality altogether. TRISTANA as a film has the same kind of fascination as a conjurer's performance. One wants to go back to it, just to see 'how it is done'. As if guessing this curiosity, Bunuel throws out a few hints, for at the end he repeats (in chronologically inverse order) brief moments from the film, teasing the mind with the pivots on which the story's real logic might hinge.

In theory, it might look as if Bunuel's procedure was similar to that suggested by Pasolini's 'poetic' cinema, where sequences are also interlaced according to a non-naturalist dramatic logic. But the films show at once that this is not so. Bunuel works by visual understatement, Pasolini uses an aesthetic borrowed from allegorical painting, which in the cinema amounts to visual overstatement. One of the reasons why his films have such a tedious stasis comes from the manner in which he 'composes' his narrative: too many scenes which are—in terms of their symbolic significance—highpoints, dramatic *moments forts* are lumped together without transition, while the peculiar gift of Bunuel is that he tantalizingly allows the spectator only a *moment faible*, where the significance of the action would require a *moment fort*, thus creating a constant dialectic between signifier and signified at the heart of the action. Catherine Deneuve choosing between two identical peas (in TRISTANA) becomes a *moment fort* (whose significance we have to discover for ourselves), whereas Massimo Girotti running naked across a volcanic desert (in TEOREMA) is a syntactic *moment faible* because coming as the last of a series of climaxes sucessively cancelling each other out.

The astonishing receptiveness of highbrow audiences for aesthetic experiments of the kind carried out by Pasolini has something to disconcert. It proves the low intellectual and artistic demands made by the vast majority of the educated public on the cinema at present, which has fostered an atmosphere of misplaced generosity and indulgence. More optimistically, however, it also indicates perhaps an increased willingness to concede that the cinema might be an art with a future. To single out Pasolini as the *bête noire* of the modern cinema is not to cast doubt on the integrity of his artistic efforts nor to begrudge him his role in stimulating a theoretical debate, but because his theory together with his practice has become a source of crippling misconceptions and aesthetic confusion. The prominence given to his work has also meant that some of the most creative and accomplished film-makers in Germany, Italy and France—Werner Herzog, Marco Belloccio or Rivette, have not reached an audience that might appreciate their contribution to the modern cinema.

Superficially it looks as if there is a kind of hiatus in film-making today, with the so-called avant-garde giving the impression of being at least half a decade behind the best narrative cinema, in thematic range as well as subtlety of expression. Perhaps it is a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*, and it would certainly be wrong to mistake the new awareness of narrative mechanisms and the paradoxical discovery of their at once 'arbitrary' status as syntax, and yet decisive role in giving **meaning** to a film for a mere lapse into retrograde primitivism. Who could overlook to what extent the most gifted film-makers in Europe have enlarged the metaphoric range of the cinema and penetrated outmoded fictions with a new sense of freedom to express a differently structured vision of reality? The narrative cinema is not dead. If it needs to disappear into the mirror of reflection, it is in order to become more 'visible'.

LA VOIE LACTEE

JACQUES RIVETTE AND L'AMOUR FOU

PETER LLOYD

PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT

LOUIS MARCORELLES: "Didn't the cinema once reach a sort of state of grace, which it has lost today?"
JACQUES RIVETTE: "Yes . . . but since it is lost, it isn't worth talking about".

Sight and Sound Autumn 1963.

The career of Jacques Rivette has entailed the exorcism of those consequences of the cinema's 'fall from grace'. It has entailed the realisation of two films, whose merits reside less in their completed state than in their conceptual essence; they would hardly qualify their creator for everlasting glory. One, PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT (1959), suffers from an *angst* attributable to the atavistic power exerted on the young director by the cinema of ANGEL FACE and BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT, two films on which Rivette wrote reviews for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The other, LA RELIGIEUSE (1964), incorporated to a certain extent within its structure this atavism, canalising the outcome into artistic statement; its formal organization reduced the hysteria of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT to a sobriety generated by fatalism. If L'AMOUR FOU (1968) sets Rivette among the best directors anywhere, it is due to the completeness of this exorcism; as in MADE IN U.S.A. (1967) of Godard, that exemplary *film maudit*, the ghosts of Hitchcock, Lang and Preminger, which have haunted the New French Cinema for the last ten years, have finally been laid to rest by L'AMOUR FOU. The classical tradition has outlived its uses; but Rivette rejects that tradition, paradoxically, only because he has absorbed its principles, received with thanks all that it has had to offer.

I: 'Ce qui était passionnant, c'était de susciter une réalité qui se mettait à exister d'elle-même . . .'

It could be said of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT that Rivette misunderstood the themes that he propounded, negated his content by its formal design. What strikes one immediately is Rivette's relationship to Preminger, both thematically (the freedom/constriction inversion and its necessary acceptance of illusion), and stylistically (the objective observation of action). But, paradoxically, the relationship is demonstrated by its misuse. In the Preminger of BONJOUR TRISTESSE (1957), for example, tragedy is attained by a final acceptance of universal responsibility, and a galling sense of loss. Preminger's style allows his characters, within their limits, to forge their own destinies, accepting always the possibility of respect and its consequences, as well as allowing the spectator to make up his own mind about the action. But, in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, Rivette commits the error of Jean Seberg in the movie of Preminger; from a balcony, he observes his characters through binoculars, comforting himself with the belief that this is a necessary objectivity. Yet, Preminger is at one further remove, observing the act of observance, while Rivette is consumed by the illusory freedom of individual choice. With no one to observe him (except the impotent spectator), he pretends to offer us a reality in a universe where characters can forge their own patterns of thought and behaviour, while all that we in fact see is a schematization of this behaviour, a mockery, however well-intentioned, of Preminger's synthesis of ethics and aesthetics.

Rivette's mistake, ultimately, is his approach to formal technique; his avowed aim was a dialectical film, a "film-discussion", and hence a film without a linear narrative structure, whose core was a situation, thus reducing the autonomy of the director. But the dilemma of the characters is, in fact, to follow a certain linea path within the closed paradigm, when their situation should enable them to choose, to adopt certain patterns of behaviour as more justifiable than others, to gradually evolve a method of action whose goal is a veritable liberty (cf. LA CHINOISE).

PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT is a film dictated by mood, by a certain attitude struck by Rivette prior to the realisation; it is, thus, a schematic film, and precludes the possibility of a dialectic except on the most superficial of levels. Characters are forced into certain roles; the parallel between the situation of the movie and the rehearsals for *Pericles* forces us into a realisation of the allegorical roles of the film, the fact, for example, that Anne equals Marina, emblematic of innocence and constantly renewed hope. Gérard Gozlan is correct when he summarises the movie in a piece of dialogue between Philip and Terry towards the end; "where are we going?" "Oh, we'll see".[1] Instead of an attempt by Rivette to balance his dramaturgy, to present a coherence even on the most muted level, we suffer a tone of vacillation and frenzy that amounts to dramatic stasis, providing an unfortunately ironic contrast with the thematic parallels of *Pericles* and METROPOLIS. By a fear of formal manipulation, Rivette denied the possibility of the democratic cinema that he would have postulated as the antithesis to 'l'atmosphère de gaullisme, menaçant et triomphant',[2] the mood which, he admits, gave rise to the film itself.

Yet it seems as if the technique of the film contradicts Rivette's avowed intention of avoiding unnecessary 'faked' manipulation by the director. Consider for a moment some aspects of the symbolism of the movie; the little, childish drawings of fierce creatures that cover the walls of Philip's room, his 'demons'. In order to demonstrate the madness of the character, Rivette resorts to a technique endorsed by the classical narrative cinema, the decor as active agent in the method of 'characterization'. Elsewhere the mood dictates and therefore constricts symbolic potential; the accent on the opening and closing of doors, for example, the hesitancy of the characters which precedes this, the framing of them individually or in groups in rooms, corridors or telephone booths is emphasized to the extent of ritualism. The specifically spatial mise-en-scene of Rivette (the ordering of characters within the frame operating in a void, punctuated by certain accented segments of the decor, cf. the photographs of war and destruction, the demons of Philip, etc.), reinforces the gratuitous element in this ritual.

Nevertheless, to recognise the indiscriminate opening of doors is to recognise the first tentative effort on the part of Rivette to achieve the autonomy of the film itself, an autonomy of the trajectory, by the inherently aleatory nature of the structure. PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT instigates, in the work of the director, narrative as cul-de-sac, as the double-back; at least, it is plain that this was the intention. But it is paradoxically just the aleatory nature of the film which precludes the demonstration of narrative contingency, by impressing on the spectator the subordination of the contingent event to the total 'pattern'. Contingency here becomes the pawn of a definite obscurantism; the same fatalistic atmosphere dominates every situation, every character, every relationship. And thus the positive effect of contingency, the possibility of good, is negated.

So one is forced to watch this deterministic pattern unweave, and can gain no comfort from the ambiguous final image, or the script-level affirmation of the continued search for the mysterious guitar-music, artistic embodiment of a spurious salvation. By attempting to escape from the essentially spectacular (read dictatorial) nature of the formal cinema as practised by Hollywood, we are presented with a more insidious form of the spectacular, pure bad faith, an insult to the depiction of reality, to which any fiction has an obligation, that of justification and acceptance. In PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, the paranoia of the characters reflects, on another, more serious dimension (that of the morality of the mise-en-scene) on the method of Rivette himself.

II: 'Je crois de plus en plus que le rôle du cinéma, c'est d'etre complètement démythifiant, démobilisateur, pessimiste'.

The universe of Jacques Rivette is a violent universe; of murder, sex, sadism, madness and suicide. The diversion from the American Cinema in this respect is that Rivette makes the violence wholly consonant with a recognisably common reality, stripping away the romantic aura of the Hollywood genre. Nevertheless, similarities remain, and in

this way it is easy to recognise PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT as a French 'film noir', with its accent on the environment as psychological landscape. Nino Frank has written of the 'film noir'; 'C'est l'accumulation de ces plans realistes sur un thème bizarre qui crée une atmosphère de cauchemar'.[3] But Rivette has accumulated the bizarre by a complete reduction of linearity, by the abolition of the motive for action which distinguishes the Western or the gangster movie. The sole motive for acts of violence in the films of Rivette is the disturbed psychic condition, striking out gratuitously in its paranoic search for identity and a suitable way of life.

But, to create a moral element, the depiction of a violent, contingent world must be balanced by the depiction of the possibilities of freedom. My criticism of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT rests on the gratuitous nature of its obsessions, the self-conscious ellipse of its form, its total introversion, its negation of any life outside itself. In LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette synthesised his personal obsessions with a universal reference, this time by the mastery of the familiar Premingerian paradoxes of freedom and inhibition, by the reversal of norms and accepted symbolic presentation.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of LA RELIGIEUSE, especially in relation to the artistic evolution of Rivette; his complete grasp of the dramatic modes of the traditional American Cinema, its classical symbolic figuration of experience. The main element of the mise-en-scene in LA RELIGIEUSE is its utilization of dramatic space (an art that Rivette has undoubtedly derived from the movies of Lang); a consideration of this utilization will explain what I mean.

The opening scene sets out the tone of the movie; the deliverance of Suzanne Simonin to the convent at Longchamps. Shot in dark, austere colours, the scene suggests intense repression with its bar-like shadows. The stark bareness of the rooms and corridors of the various convents work excellently on the level of decor, both functional and symbolic of the void, the arid spiritual life. Yet one's response is inverted by Rivette in his direction of the scenes around the less repressed convent of St Eutrope d'Arpagon, run by the lesbian Mother Superior, Mme de Chelles. In one scene, Mme de Chelles sits with Suzanne on the edge of a well in the convent grounds, and embraces her, consoling her for her previous misfortunes. The environment, the fresh, natural garden, suggests a new freedom for Suzanne, but the two figures resting precipitously against the well, and the sensuality of the embrace unbalance this first reaction. In the tradition of Preminger, Rivette respects his narrative sufficiently not to disbalance it by the intrusion of the manipulator; he allows the spectator to react on whichever level he chooses.

For, as Suzanne is 'free' through her constant (and constantly aborted) search for individual expression, Mme de Chelles (and later, Père Lemoine) are constricted by their sexual demands, by their inability to achieve a liberty which, if not always expressed, is yet latent in Suzanne. We notice the four-poster bed in which Suzanne is sleeping when Mme de Chelles attempts to seduce her; the double movement of the characters in this scene (Suzanne getting out of bed as Mme de Chelles tries to slip in) expresses their individual natures in relation to their mutual situation, the metaphoric level of the scene juxtaposing the roles of the characters without disturbing the narrative in any way. Similar images define more sharply the circumstances of the 'imprisoned'; Mme de Chelles collapsed against the locked door of Suzanne's bedroom, with the long corridor stretched out behind her. Père Lemoine seen cramped behind the bars of the confessional.

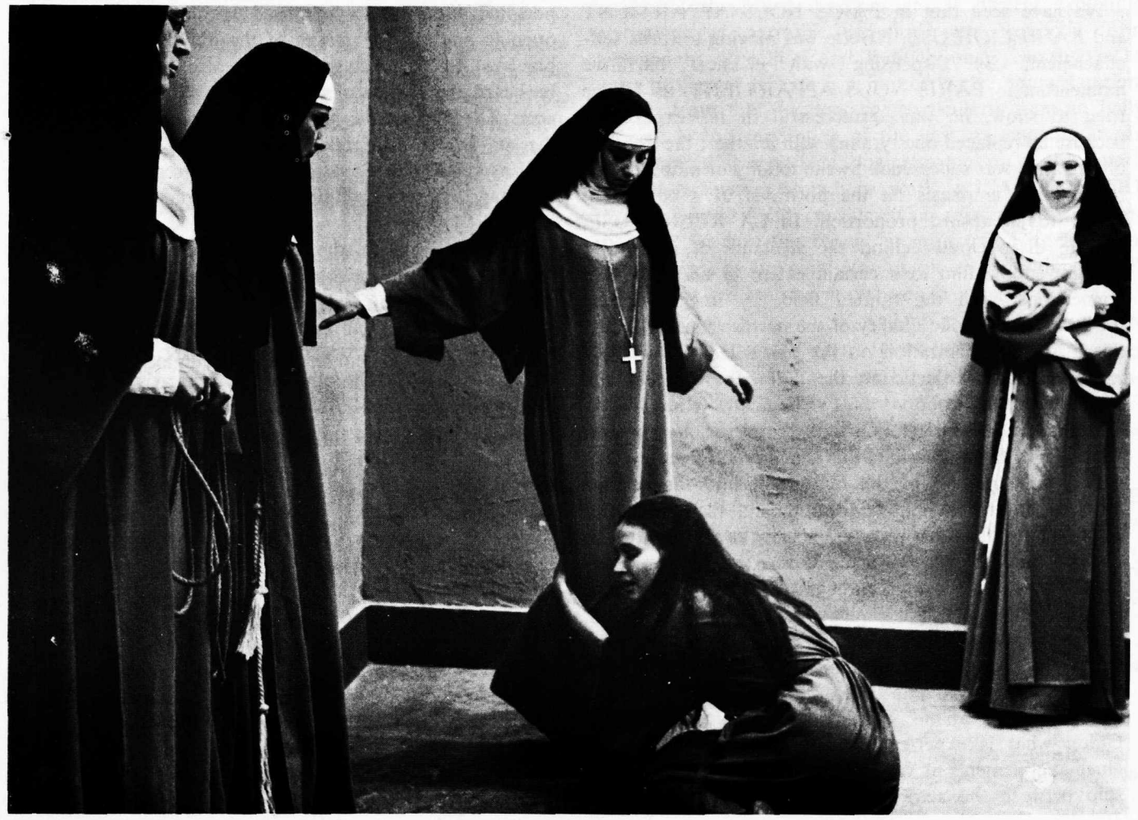
Such images as these contradict any simplified view of the characters or the situations presented in the film, and illustrate very clearly the aesthetic on which the mise-en-scene is founded. If, in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, the situations of the 'narrative' are intellectually conceived and hence elicit the uncomfortable response often felt when allegory poses as reality, the theme of LA RELIGIEUSE is forceful through its subordination to the gestures of the characters and the acts within the narrative situations. In the career of Rivette, LA RELIGIEUSE represents the classical response to mise-en-scene, and as such a development in the director's attempt to efface himself almost entirely behind his material. In an article on EVA, of Joseph Losey, Michel Mourlet makes a distinction between two antithetical conceptions of mise-en-scene; the one representing 'la dramaturgie naturelle en relief', where the attitude of the director to his film is conveyed through the inherently symbolic nature of his fiction, elevating the individual act and the particular situation onto a universal plane, the other representing 'la dramaturgie en creux' where, in Mourlet's words, 'par coquetterie intellectuelle, ce qui est inutile ou accessoire est souligné, les temps faibles cultivés, l'expression volontairement non signifiante'.[4] One might imagine this a commonplace aesthetic distinction, if the hostility towards the American Cinema was not so widespread as it apparently is.

It relates, of course, to the symbolic conception of the world as represented by Hollywood, which has been referred to as a 'syntagmatically created symbolism'; that is, incorporated within the linear structure of the movie, and arising from the symbolic potential of the material as visualised by the director. It is a limited symbolism, but not entirely static; consider, for example (one among many) the gradation of reds in ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS of Douglas Sirk. One's reaction to it, however, is that it creates an artificial tension in the relation of the fiction to everyday experience. The levels of meaning threaten to engulf that experience by the inherent formal structure imposing a facile artistic affirmation by complete exclusion of the contingent. Ultimately, such a symbolism can only exist within an inclusive structure which, although providing a formalization of the chaos of experience, borders on the unreal because of the excessively paradigmatic dimension.

Rivette's own opinion on LA RELIGIEUSE is brief; 'J'avais utilisé . . . les methodes traditionnelles de tournage, et je m'étais beaucoup ennuyé'.[5] The movie proved that he had learnt his lessons well, but the achievement is always as limited as the aesthetic is viable. Nevertheless, only PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT and LA RELIGIEUSE could have made possible L'AMOUR FOU.

III: 'Je crois de plus en plus qu'il n'y a pas d'auteur dans les films; qu'un film, c'est quelque chose qui préexiste. Ca n'est intéressant que si on a ce sentiment que le film préexiste et qu'on s'efforce d'aller vers lui, de le découvrir,

L'AMOUR FOU



LA RELIGIEUSE

en prenant des précautions pour ne pas trop l'abîmer, le déformer'.

L'AMOUR FOU is about the rehearsal for a play and the crack-up of a marriage. The central character, Sebastien, is rehearsing a production of *Andromaque*, by Racine, with his wife Claire playing the leading role. Near the beginning of rehearsals, she leaves the production, pleading claustrophobia at the presence of a television crew filming the proceedings and interviewing the artists; she is replaced by the ex-wife of Sebastien, Marta. As the rehearsals continue, Claire becomes progressively more paranoid; gratuitously, she sleeps with an ex-lover, while Sebastient is himself unfaithful with an actress from the theatre. Eventually, after a weekend during which Claire and Sebastien, locked in their apartment, engage in an orgy of sex and destruction, she boards a train and leaves him.

Essentially, L'AMOUR FOU commences from a situation; there is no pre-ordained plot, indeed the movie was shot from day to day, after discussions between director, technicians and players, with only one determined event in mind, the final departure of Claire. The revolutionary aspect of L'AMOUR FOU is evidently in the conception of narrative structure, and the dazzling paradox that it implies is that of a film in which there is a possibility of **the work itself contradicting its author.** This is made possible by the dynamics of the structure and the move towards effacement on the part of the director. The importance of the movie is its participation in these two areas, those of narrative and symbolism, and it is around these areas that the following discussion is centred.

We have seen that in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT and LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette was moving towards self-effacement. By dispensing with classical narrative momentum in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, as I have tried to show, he was unsuccessful in his experiment because he replaced one tyranny with another; the linearity of narrative was superseded by the totality of mood, which reduced the emphasis on the portrayal of a contingent reality to an absurd proportion. In LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette disappeared behind the structure of the work; he allowed the film to a certain extent to make its own connections, with the limited field, by integrating the intrinsically symbolic quality of the narrative situation. By this austere concentration on the particular, he was able to formulate a dialectic on the nature of freedom and repression.

But in L'AMOUR FOU, the director has almost vanished, as far as possible; this is achieved by an enquiry, within the structure of the film itself, into the relation between naturalism and stylization, and their dialectical interplay. In their entirety, the scenes at the theatre are shot on 16mm blown up for the 35 screen, while the scenes of the personal life of Claire and Sebastien are shot in 35mm. While the 16mm sequences are intensely 'directed', with their blatant hand-held camera work and the grainy stock, the sequences on 35mm are almost totally static and unobtrusive. Rivette's idea was the achievement of a vertiginous 'en abime' effect (to use the expression of Gide); what is experienced is the relationship between cinematic elements at various levels. There is the relationship between the actors in L'AMOUR FOU and their roles in the film, between the characters and their roles in *Andromaque*, between the participants in the *Andromaque* rehearsals and the television crew, between the work of the TV crew and the 35mm sequences, and between Rivette and the audience, that is to say between Life and Cinema. Here we are presented with the consequences of cinematic 'objectivity' as exemplified, for example, in the work of directors like Lang and Preminger, extrapolated to its furthest degree. The structure of the film arises organically from the interplay between individual elements, but what is important here is the relatively minor part played by the director as choreographer of all aspects. With L'AMOUR FOU, Rivette comes full circle; from his critical work, whose centre is the apotheosis of the auteur, to his own direction whose core is self-effacement. Film and auteur are synthesized.

Inevitably, however, the effacement cannot be total, not even with cinéma-vérité, to which L'AMOUR FOU approximates in many respects (cf. the hand-held camera work of André Labarth's TV crew). In the cinema, as in the other arts, creative action implies morality, and every shot, every gesture, every element of montage is inexorably linked to a certain moral conception of the relationship between Art and Life. But the advance that Rivette has made is from a traditional conception of the relationship (the belief in the conditional autonomy of the art work) to a conception which creates structure by emphasising dissonance, which creates art by merging it, to a great extent, with the reality that it embodies.

In the primary idea of L'AMOUR FOU can be perceived a certain pliable internal structure, the parallel between art (*Andromaque*) and life (the Claire-Sebastien personal life) itself symbolised within the movie. The opening and closing images of the film are the same; the blank white canvas stage at the theatre, behind which can be heard the sounds of the players awaiting the performance. The stage is the metaphor for the basic structure of the movie, the void filled by movement and gesture, as well as relating to Sebastien's own conception of Racine, the stage as room within which characters define their being.

The parallel with the American Cinema once again presents itself, in the Hollywood conception of the art-reality relationship. The work of a director like Cukor is symptomatic here; his continued thematic preoccupation (cf. PHILADELPHIA STORY, A STAR IS BORN) with the life-spectacle dichotomy has its firm axis in an inverse movement. His films are paradigms where the two roles within each character aid dialectically in the continual process of self-definition. But it **is** a paradigmatic method, a formal manipulation, whose aesthetic is viable only when simultaneously applicable to experience; it is in constant danger of becoming constricting in its rigorous form. This is a dilemma of which Rivette was obviously quite aware; and L'AMOUR FOU is patently in revolt against such spurious formalization.

Thus, narrative is reduced to a skeleton; in an interview, Rivette referred to the construction of his movie as being hinged on certain 'pivots narratifs',[6] elements within the situation around which expanding situations are being constantly improvised. Paradoxically the flashback method does not hamper this emphasis on the contingent; it does not define the trajectory, serving only as a basis for the

enquiry into truth beginning from a fixed position in the present.

The basic form of these 'pivots narratifs' consists of situations which mirror in reality the fictional situations of Racine. The phrase of Breton which Rivette took as the title of his film is an obvious comment on the doomed passionate relationships which Racine presents to us; 'ne puis-je savoir si j'aime ou si je hais?'—Hermione's exasperated question reflects the condition of Claire and Sebastien in its merging of antithetical emotions, in the intricate patterns of alternate sex and violence experienced in the film. But Rivette has said of the narrative situations; 'le principe c'était laisser les choses venir d'elles-mêmes, sans jamais les forcer, d'être là comme témoin'.[7] Certain actions of the characters bear both an elliptical relation to the central situation and yet retain their force as a contingency in their departure from the rigorous subordination of events to a total schema. The scenes where Claire, on a whim, attempts to purchase a small puppy, similar to one seen on a record cover, is an example. As an expression of her frustrated maternal instincts, the action is of thematic relevance; a cause for the strain of the marriage is the absence of any children. But yet it bears no obvious schematic relevance to the narrative. Its equilibrium resides in an integration within huge contingent areas. As Rivette says, it bears witness to a character, rather than dictating a certain symbolic conception.

The narrative structure of L'AMOUR FOU is allied to Rivette's idea of the role of the actor, especially in comparison between the theatre and the cinema. For Rivette, the theatre is a mechanism repeated incessantly by the actor, while the cinema is constantly in search of 'la surprise savante du hasard' (as he wrote in a review of Preminger's ANGEL FACE). With the obvious emphasis on the gesture and movement of the actor, because of the absence of formalised discourse, and the consequent reliance on improvisation, this is important. It also reflects on the role of Sebastien in the film, his timidity in the face of contingency and his arrogance in the face of the security of order.

But the area which is fundamentally concerned with the disappearance of narrative order is the symbolic quality of the movie. As the cinematic syntax is created by dramatic progression, so the symbolism is simultaneously organic, blossoming out as the movie takes shape. For, if any pre-ordained form is non-existent, the symbolic quality of situations, events or gestures cannot be organised. And the appearance of contingency (assuming, naturally, a fringe symbolism of its own) further complicates the process; situations become symbolic by their very non-development, or, alternatively, by their progression. This is all an increased implication of the objective mode of the film; Rivette throws the emphasis onto the audience, they are free to perceive the very dynamics of the film's symbolic architecture. Thus, symbolic suggestion pervades the movie; in the same way as the psychology of character in Racine is only analysable through the language, the film of Rivette is only approachable through the **immanent** symbolic quality of the images. Examples abound in the film; the madness of Claire, resulting in her simultaneous embracing and rejection of reality, is demonstrated by her constant relapse into the foetal positions, as she crouches in corners of the apartment. This physical position will ultimately be adopted by Sebastien, as the madness of his wife is transferred to him; at the end of the movie he crouches on the floor, listening repeatedly to the hysterical tape-recordings made by Claire in her solitude, of speeches from Andromaque, traffic noises, the beating of her heart. Another extraordinary example comes just before Sebastien returns to the theatre after his orgy in the apartment. We have a close-up of his face watching Claire, then he moves out of frame, and the camera rests on a large hole in the wall made earlier with an axe. The movement, implying an irresponsibility, conveys the gaping rent in the marriage caused by their activity, but what is important is the ascetic attention that Rivette has devoted to the composition of each shot of the movie, to be able to impart such suggestion to a totally contingent, ordinary gesture.

A similar principle governs the decor of the movie. Predominantly, Rivette shows us characters isolated against blank space (the theatre, the Claire-Sebastien apartment), expression of the void that they attempt to fill in their personal relations, and an evident continuation of the 'labyrinths' of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT. Again, the symbolic properties of the decor are always immanent rather than emphasised; consider, for example, the palm-tree tapestry in one corner of the apartment, with its connotations of a paradise beyond the reach of the protagonists.

The achievement of L'AMOUR FOU is in its reorganization of modes of narrative form; in this respect, it places Rivette alongside Godard, although it should perhaps be said that these two directors are at present exploiting variations of narrative technique and symbolic form grasped by Rossellini and Bunuel some years ago. The next project of Rivette is a film of twelve hours duration, which, I am told, he does not particularly want anybody to see; in the conception of the idea, at any rate, it can be regarded as a perfectly logical extension of the experimental techniques already at work in L'AMOUR FOU. When asked if he considered a revolutionary cinema possible, he gave this reply; "je crois qu'un cinéma révolutionnaire, ça ne peut être qu'un cinéma 'différentiel', un cinéma qui remette en question le reste du cinéma".[8]

Alongside such movies as MADE IN U.S.A. and DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE of Godard, L'AMOUR FOU represents precisely that cinema 'différentiel', the cinema that, by putting the medium itself in question, represents the truly progressive element in the art.

PETER LLOYD

FOOTNOTES

1. Gérard Gozlan: *Positif* 47, 1962 reprinted in *The New Wave* (ed. Peter Graham), Secker & Warburg 1968.
2. Interview with Rivette: *Positif* 104 April 1969.
3. Nino Frank: 'Dynamisme de la mort violent', *L'Ecran Français* 61, 28 August 1946.
4. *Présence du Cinéma* No. 20, March-April 1964.
5. *Positif* 104.
6. Interview with Rivette: *Jeune Cinéma* 36, February 1969.
7. Interview with Rivette: *Cahiers du Cinéma*, September 1968.
8. Ibid.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY

STRATEGIA DEL RAGNO (THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY). Italy 1970. **Dir** Bernardo Bertolucci. **Sc** B.B., Marilu Parolini, Edoardo de Gregoro from J.L.Borges' *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*. **Phot** Vittorio Storard, Franco di Giacomo (Eastmancolor, Technicolor). **Mus** Verdi's *Rigoletto*. **Cast** Giulio Brogi (Athos Magnani), Alida Valli (Draifa), Tino Scolti, Pippo Cempanini, Franco Giovanelli. **Production** R.A.I.-T.V. 110 min.

Bertolucci is preoccupied with doubleness. He creates a looking-glass world in which the complementary alterity of the worlds on either side of the glass is defined symmetrically as a mutual lack. To step through the looking-glass solves no problems since the completeness absent on one side is also absent on the other. For Bertolucci dialectic is not so much a given *a priori* as a mirage that beckons invitingly on the horizon. His cinema strains as vainly as ONE PLUS ONE to cause electricity to flow across the spark gap, to force together gear wheels which remain obstinately far apart. The looking-glass, for Bertolucci, has all the blinding, flashing fascination of Medusa's mirror. He is therefore interested in Borges, whose 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero' inspired THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY, but Borges' interest in curious affinities across time and space, in the silent opening and closing of cosmic circuits is replaced rather by a lack of congruity, echo becomes a blankness. Similarly, although Bertolucci has Freudianised the story, by providing Athos Magnani, the supposed hero and actual traitor of Tara, with a mistress, Draifa, with whom the son also becomes involved, the implications of THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY are decidedly anti-Freudian. The return to Tara, the attempt to explore the past on the part of Athos Magnani, the son, does not so much release him from an obsession as supply him with one. Freedom and identity are not linked but cancel one another out.

The idea of the picture as a return into 'the realm of pre-conscious memory' is strongly reinforced by the mise-en-scene - the slow pans, the static, aesthetically framed compositions of Athos walking the narrow streets of the old town. the way in which the son constantly hovers on the fringes of the image, like an intruder into a world in which he has no place. Draifa's villa with its copious, overhanging green foliage itself symbolises the density and obscurity of the past, of sexual desire, of unconscious motivations. When Athos first sees Draifa she is separated and distanced from him, as in a dream, by an archway through which he has to pass to greet her. As if to suggest the dangers of a descent into the world of memory she tells him not to be afraid before they pass through the blackened doorway into the house. Bertolucci emphasises that the decision to do this is voluntary, both in the fact that Athos stays despite his own insistence, and that of Draifa, to leave; in the composition of the shot in which Athos, on an old bicycle passes at right angles directly under a modern freeway across which cars are speeding from right to left. But the 'pastoral' he encounters is filled with menance: the tall crops of maize on either side, the loud mooing of a cow heard on the soundtrack, the peasants who force him back under the bridge again. The past rejects the present, just as the present recoils from the past.

The parallel between father and son, established by having Guilio Brogi play both parts and by the use of intercut flashbacks, may seem unnecessarily laboured, but it is more suggestive than it appears. For the threat which the father poses to the son is not so much that of a dominating Oedipal figure and sexual rival, as of a model, a pattern, a deeply internalised ideal. Everything about Bertolucci's presentation of the father, in particular the identification through the romantic red scarf and British military jacket, suggests that he is an idealised projection of the son, a dream of what he himself would like to be. In his return to Tara the son can only repeat, in the form of farce, Athos Magnani's grandiose exploits: enter into a relationship with Draifa, mirror his fascination with the heroic, be conspired against by the same conspirators. He is doomed to repetition. The absent father broods over his own life, ensnaring him in the same mythological web which he has cast over the whole town. (The shot in which he stands silhouetted against the roof tops.) In finding out his father he finds out himself. Draifa, in fact, takes the son for the father. The relationship between the two is expressed in the concise but complex image in which the father gazes in terror through the barred window at the streets where a lion which has escaped from the circus is apparently roaming, while Draifa, her back turned to him talks about him to the son, who is situated beyond the frame - on the other side of the looking-glass. Thus the father is essentially a double and as always the shock in meeting a double is to discover in his features one's own face. Draifa, in describing one, with a timeless, sphinx-like knowledge, is also talking about the other. The name 'Athos Magnani' has 'the meaning or sound of rebellion or courage' but the name only designates a myth.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY is not an explicitly political film, but, insofar as it deals with Italy's Fascist past, a past with which, presumably, it is necessary to come to terms, it is a film with political implications. If Athos Magnani can be taken as a representative of Italy in the thirties then Bertolucci seems to be suggesting that perhaps there was all too little resistance to Fascism and that the cause of anti-Fascism was little more than a heroic but necessary legend. 'We were anti-Fascists and perhaps we didn't even know what it meant' says one of the conspirators, 'we fancied conspiracies, the Ernani .... but we understood nothing, absolutely nothing.' They are characters whose desire outruns their performance. Perhaps their sexual boasts - 'I'm 75 and I've got a girl friend who's pregnant' - are all of a piece with the vague and rhetorical ambitions of the song - 'we'll raise the barricades of real freedom'. There is a strange mixture of optimism and defeatism. On the one hand there is the vacant complacency of the conspirators as they sit on a log and murmur 'Fascism is by now embedded in the people', on the other their naïve, heavily gesticulated, enthusiasm as they plot the assassination of the Duce - who, as it happens, never comes to Tara at all. Athos Magnani's detachment from this suggests that, despite his romantic exterior, he is nevertheless a realist; perhaps more intelligent than the others he is careful not to confuse gestures with hard facts. So appearances, in life and death, become all. The question, for Bertolucci and for Athos Magnani the son, is whether this political impotence of the older generation is a ground for satisfaction or concern.

In his mise-en-scene Bertolucci's overriding concern is to build up a primitive, heroic, naïve, brutalised mythicised

world. The blank, silent, empty streets of the town recall Chirico, the ominous greenery of the countryside the work of Max Ernst. The animal paintings of Ligabue which appear over the credits show aggressors and predators - lions, tigers, snakes, fighting cocks. As I understand it, Bertolucci is linking Fascism with non-rational, intuitive, instinctive modes of feeling and connecting it with the peasant/folk culture which gave birth to it. There is a great emphasis in the movie on traditional crafts, songs, customs; on smells, eating, music, violence. Thus both Fascism and anti-Fascism are seen as degraded transpositions and extensions of the mythological imperatives of a decaying folk culture. Under the gaze of history unities come to the surface and conflicts disappear. The 'maledizione' (curse) of Italy is seen as being essentially cultural. Tara symbolises a culture which has died, which can neither be forgotten nor disposed of, yet which has nothing to teach because it itself never had anything to learn, but only went on trying to recall old memories.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY depicts a personal and cultural identity crisis, in which the return to the past in search of wisdom and enlightenment is seen as analogous to looking for the Tables of the Law in a pile of broken rubble. It is a property master's wardrobe, offering endless costumes, masquerades, roles, never the truth. For Bertolucci Tara is what Europe was for Dostoevsky, a graveyard ..... but what if a graveyard is your only starting point?

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY is, on every level, a very accomplished film, which clearly establishes Bertolucci in the front rank of European directors. Nevertheless it does leave one with a small, but nagging sense of dissatisfaction, whose source is somewhat difficult to pinpoint but which, in the final analysis, resolves itself into our familiar criticism of the European cinema: that the mise-en-scene serves primarily to block in a conception that has already been drawn in outline, while the director in the American cinema is much more akin to a painter of the New York school, who creates directly onto the canvas and whose awareness of what he can do is more closely related to his practical experience and his knowledge of the potentialities of the medium. The point can be made another way by noting that when Bertolucci crystallises the significance of the picture in particular images, these tend to relate directly to the totality and not to be fully and expressively embodied in a particular context. This could be validated by invoking, though in a rather different way, Pasolini's distinction between cinematic prose and cinematic poetry. It could be argued that the American cinema with its narrative emphasis and orientation toward the immediate context is a cinema of prose, the European cinema, with its freer construction and orientation toward the totality, one of poetry. Hence, at the very least, the American and European traditions simply represent alternative paths, both, in their own way, equally valid. But this would be altogether too facile for in the most fully achieved art of any kind there is no antithesis: the resonance which a local moment carries is precisely a function of its strategic placing. But against the holistic critic, with his solemn litany of 'form', 'organisation', 'structure', 'totality', 'balance', one is tempted to press the argument still further to insist, against, say, Schucking, who criticised Shakespeare for the sin of episodic intensification, that it is precisely in the expanded significance of a particular local moment, in its apparently gratuitous complexity, in its ability, whether in Shakespeare or Hitchcock, to bear, without fudging or strain the full significating weight of the entire work. Further, that it is precisely this cinema which is poetic.

A continuing danger in contemporary film criticism is the preoccupation of concocting simplistic recipes for artistic creation. The idea that lateral camera movements provided direct access to reality is supplanted by the equally futile notion that montage and 'le direct' constitute the A-Z of a revolutionary cinema. Bertolucci is a director who, in his formative period, has been exposed to seductive and potentially damaging influences, but who has nevertheless managed to find his own way. Ultimately, one feels, the interest of what he has to say will be fully reflected in his way of saying it. Bertolucci is a director in whom one continues to have the utmost confidence.

DAVID MORSE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ATTI DEGLI APOSTOLI (ACTS OF THE APOSTLES). Italy 1968. **Dir** Roberto Rossellini. **Adapt** Vittorio Bonicelli, D. de la Rochefoucault, R.R. Luciano Scatta. **Phot** Mario Fiorelti. **Mus** Mario Nascimbene. **Cast** Eduardo Torricella (Paulus), Jacques Dumur (Peter), Mohamed Kovka (John), Bradai Ridha (James the elder), Zoviten (James the younger), Zignan Honune (Stephen). **Production** RAI/ORTF/TVE/Studio Hamburg.

Due to visions only of the truncated version of ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (two out of the five episodes, under the general title 'From Jerusalem to Damascus'), the first problem arises with a consideration of Rossellini's intrinsic attitude towards his material. The extraordinary equilibrium demonstrated by the work is one created by the dichotomy between separate but related necessities, on the one hand, a fastidiously 'scientific' epochal reconstruction, and on the other, the need to transform the specifically historic onto a universal ontological plane. These 'historic figures' (Peter, Paul), placed before us, are metamorphosed into 'models of action' through a moral aspect.

Yet, despite its subject, the movie of Rossellini is humanist rather than Christian in its conception, although his mise-en-scene testifies to the acceptance of the presence of a higher spiritual reality. This is demonstrated in the sequence when Ariostarchus, the slave, points out to the newly appointed Roman governor the place where Christ collapsed under the weight of the cross. As they talk, the camera cranes up unobtrusively and delicately to set the characters in the spiritual context, isolating them in deference to their environment. Similarly, Rossellini is careful to demonstrate the sanctity of Golgotha itself; as the two characters approach the hill, the camera situates them in long-shot to one side of the frame, with the environment again dominant.

However, Rossellini seems more concerned with the validity of the apostolic action qua human action. He is concerned with the dignity of the behaviour of the apostles as human beings, rather than as disciples of Christ, although the one function evidently relates to the other. An example of this

ERMANNO OLMI: a filmography

1953–1961: about forty documentaries, including:
LA DIGA DE GHIACCIAIO (1954)
MANNON: FINESTRA DUE (1956)

1959 *IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO* (TIME STOOD STILL). Italy. 80 min. **Prod** Edisonvolta S.p.A. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Carlo Bellero. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Pier Emilio Bassi. **Cast** Natale Rossi, Roberto Seveso, Paolo Quadrubbi.

1961 *IL POSTO* (THE JOB). Italy. 105 min. **Prod** Titanus, **Scr** Olmi, **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Cast** Loredana Detto (Antonietta), Sandro Panzeri (Domenico).

1963 *I FIDANZATI* (THE FIANCES). Italy. 75 min. **Prod** Titanus Sicilia/22 Dicembre. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Gianni Ferrio. **Cast** Carlo Cabrini (Giovanni), Anna Canzi (Liliana).

1965 *E VENNE UN UOMO* (A MAN CALLED JOHN). Italy. 90 min. **Prod** Vincenzo Labella. **Scr** Olmi and Labella. **Phot** Piero Portalup. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Franco Potenza. **Cast** Rod Steiger (Pope John). Adolpho Celi (the Bishop). Pietro Gelmi.

1968 *UN CERTO GIORNO* (ONE FINE DAY). Italy. 102 min. **Prod** Cinema-Italnoleggio Cinematografico-Istituto Luce. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Ed** Olmi. **Mus** Gino Peguri. **Cast** Brunetto Del Vita (Bruno), Lidia Fuortes (girl interviewer), Vitaliano Damioli (Davioli), Raffael Modugno (the artist), Giovanna Ceresa (Account Executive), Mario Crosignani (Elena).

1969 *I RECUPERANTI* (THE SCAVENGERS). Italy. 104 min. **Prod** R.A.I.-T.V./Palumbo Productions. **Scr** Olmi, M.R. Stern, Tullio Kezich. **Phot** Olmi. **Ed** Olmi. **Mus** Gianni Ferrio. **Cast** Andreino Carli, Antonio Lunardi, Alessandra Micheletto.

comes with the parallel between the rectangular enclosure of the 'commune' and the similar enclosure of the sacrificial altar of the Sanhedrin. Mostly, Rossellini's camera is at ground level during the scenes in the commune; if the community-life is shown from a high-angle or through long-shot, it is because a sense of the totality, the inclusiveness of this life necessitates it. Characters within the frame move from group to group, are united by the long takes of Rossellini, the smooth panning around the courtyard; there is an impression of flux, of a certain communal rhythm, which is extraneous (although not necessarily so) to religious connotations. Rossellini gives us images in close-up of the simple labour of the community, the baking of bread, the weaving of mats. Indeed, throughout the film, the Christian life has been identified with the simplicity of peasant work; one notes the beginning of the movie, where the conversation between the governor and the slave is encapsulated by Rossellini in images such as the potter at work in the small house, or the locksmith in his alley-booth, on which the camera lingers after the principal characters have exited from the frame. However, the sacrificial square of the Sanhedrin is viewed almost entirely from a high-angle shot; the aim is not to present the inclusiveness of a life equivalent to that of the commune but to insinuate a moral context through a suggested comparison. The court-yard is, in fact, shown through slow-pans following the actions of characters; the emphasis is on a grim ritualism, a meaningless blood-letting, at the centre of which is the constant flame of the huge sacrificial altar, with the blood running to its centre. Against the imagery of water (cf. the Pentecostal baptisms, the washing of feet before meals) is posited the fire of the Sanhedrin, as a prefigurement of the gratuitous violence of Stephen's martyrdom.

This symbolic antithesis is, in fact, another aspect of the essential dualism at the centre of Rossellini's method in this film, a dualism arising from the inherently humanist ethic which informs it. It is important to emphasise, however, that, despite the didactic historico-moral foundation of ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, this is not a schematic dualism; as ever, Rossellini's vision manifests itself in the unity of the individual image. His film accords well with Panofsky's concise definition of humanism (in The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline), for what it presents is both 'the insistence on human values' but also 'the acceptance of human limitation'. And this presentation, continually implying the *context* of the action, is achieved by a very stringent mise-en-scene, consisting almost entirely of the zoom-shot; this camera-movement continually elevates the discourse from an individual plane to a contextual one, by relating character to situation, action to environment.

One recalls the 'context' shots of early Rossellini; in GERMANY YEAR ZERO (1947), for example, where rapid tracking-shots were followed by a sharp lateral movement, situating the character, indicating environment and purpose. In that movie, this technique was subjected to a rigorous gradation; from the boy's journey to his family's dwelling, or the schoolmaster's flat, to the bomb-shelter of the young girl, and that final image of the ruined street up which he walks while bells peal overhead, before committing suicide. In ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, these shots re-appear (cf. the appearance of the apostles in the streets of Jerusalem at Pentecost) and retain a validity for Rossellini; it is important to note, for example, that Paul is never seen in such a context (that is, with a specific direction) until *after* his conversion, when he is seen entering Damascus.

But mostly it is the function of the zoom to suggest contexts and to supply the connections between the human actions of the apostles and an abstract 'religious' tone. The first important use of the camera-movement is purely contextual: the Governor and Ariostarchus in the temple at Jerusalem. Rossellini zooms in for the conversation and then out once more. But the scene in the commune when Mathew is chosen as the apostolic successor to Judas imparts a symbolic level to the functionalism of the movement; after he has been chosen, and the disciples kneel to pray, Rossellini slowly zooms out, enlarging the sphere of vision as the physical reality fuses with a higher, spiritual reality. This is the stylistic key to the movie, by means of which the aesthetic is capable of sustaining an abstract, almost allegorical burden. On two occasions during which Peter is the central figure (his speeches at Pentecost and in the temple after the healing of the beggar), we find again this zoom movement, 'out' as expression of the supernatural, placing the merely human in a perspective, 'in' as expression of the mortal and the immediate. This inverse movement represents a dialectical style, exemplifying alternately action and limitation, but fusing them through the quality of the image, concentrating on the human action, but unifying it through the abstract expression of belief. An example comes in the sequence when Peter, John and Stephen preach in the temple, in defiance of the Sanhedrin. The structure of the sequence is composed of a zoom-out and a zoom-in, repeated three times (for each disciple as he preaches), connected by two zip-pans. It is precisely the formal stylistic repetition which reveals continuity in the individual action.

The summation of Rossellini's movie is the image of Stephen's corpse hanging upside-down from a tree; with the zoom-out, we see the connection between human heroism and religious martyrdom, the tragedy (achievement and cost) of the Christian movement, a protest against universal brutality, the synthesis of human and superhuman, the growth of the tree and the death of the martyr. ACTS OF THE APOSTLES ends with the restoration of Paul's sight and his joyful cry - 'I can see', thus beginning and ending with an affirmation of lucidity which is the fruit of Rossellini's deceptively simple aesthetic.

PETER LLOYD

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER

DER AMERIKANISCHE SOLDAT (THE AMERICAN SOLDIER). W-Germany 1970. **Dir** Rainer Werner Fassbinder. **Sc** R.W.F. **Phot** Dietrich Lohmann. **Mus** Peer Raben. **Ed** Thea Eymesz. **Cast** Karl Scheid (Ricky), Elga Sorbas (Rosa), Jan George (Jan), Hark Bohm (Doc), Ingrid Caven (singer), Margareta von Trotta (maid). **Production** Antiteater Munich. 80 min.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder — actor, playwright, theatrical producer and film director into the bargain — has not shrunk from exposing his divers talents to the public eye, and as far as the cinema is concerned, he has established himself at an unusually early age as the most prominent personality on the contemporary German scene. He has established not only a name but also, thanks to his popularity, a financial independence which allows him and his colleagues in the Munich 'antiteater' to keep producing new films with the prolific rapidity of a Godard. One of his most recent works, served up at the Mannheim festival last October, is THE AMERICAN SOLDIER, the latest in a series of films which reveal his fascination with the American cinema and its traditional genres. Although this fascination has provoked head-shaking censure from some quarters, THE AMERICAN SOLDIER indicates that it is controlled rather than indulgent, and that behind the quotation and the pastiche there is a degree of cinematic awareness and directorial authority that suggests Fassbinder's is not an over-blown reputation.

THE AMERICAN SOLDIER is in outline a simple tale. Richard Murphy, a first generation American and veteran of Vietnam, returns to the West German city (Munich) of his boyhood, as a hired killer with an assignment to carry out a number of underworld assassinations. He visits the scenes of his early youth, looks up a boyhood friend (played by Fassbinder himself), goes to see his mother and younger brother - and completes his assignment, efficiently liquidating a homosexual gypsy, a girl who pushes drugs in a night-club, and the mistress of one of the men who hired him. The latter, satisfied with his services, prepare to dispatch him in his turn: when he goes, as ordered, to collect his earnings from a left-luggage locker at the station, he falls into their trap and is finally himself gunned down.

The plot has its fair share of violence, but not only is violence laconically played down, rather than played up for sensation by Fassbinder's direction, it is curiously at odds with the mood of gentle nostalgia which is the film's most striking general characteristic. With its unhurried pace and lingering shots of a quiet, almost unpeopled urban world, with its wistful score and elegaic theme-song ('So much tenderness'), THE AMERICAN SOLDIER seems more attuned in mood to the theme of childhood revisited than to a series of cold-blooded killings. In fact, the nostalgia is not primarily generated by the theme of Murphy's journey into his personal past, for this theme is subsumed in the wider issue of Fassbinder's explicit confrontation with the *cinematic* past. His film is something like an act of nostalgic homage to the American gangster movie of the 30s, 40s and 50s, but an act of homage which is at once critical, self-critical and historically conscious. The idiom of the genre is lovingly re-created, but not simply for the purposes of admiring pastiche: in transposing it into Europe and the present, Fassbinder shows how the values which the genre once so confidently endorsed, can no longer be sustained; how, in fact, the traditional gangster film is a thing of the past, and how his own attempt at loving re-creation is, in one sense, little more than cinematic necrophilia.

The opening scene catches the idiom with almost quotational precision. A darkened room, a ticking clock, and a low lamp casting a pool of light on a table where, amidst the littered evidence of heavy drinking, three men in shirt sleeves and shoulder-holsters are playing poker with tense and taciturn deliberation. They are familiar types: the rabbity, bespectacled intellectual (even referred to as 'Doc'), the fat, perspiring heavy who stakes high and loses, and the tight-lipped, hard-faced commanding figure who remains cool and wins. The pace is slow and the atmosphere of nervous expectation acute, until the shrill ringing of a telephone. The authoritative figure takes the call in silence, replaces the receiver and announces curtly, 'He is here.' Music strikes up with a flourish, and cut to the night-time streets of the city - after the prologue, enter the hero, triumphantly, almost with trumpet and drum; white-suited, broad-brimmed hat thrust back, one hand on the wheel of a large American car, the other clutching a whisky bottle, as he drives down the approach roads to Munich with a blonde on the front seat beside him.

The expectations raised by this opening are, however, left subtly unfulfilled. Resemblance to the American gangster film proves to be only skin-deep, for something is missing, some quality of innocence has been lost. Where, in the American genre, violence, brutality and contempt for human life were always embraced, and to some extent redeemed, by a moral framework that asserted the value of life and affirmed certain liberal, humanist ideals, Fassbinder's world is one bereft of moral norms, one where violence is casual, arbitrary and irredeemable. The border between legality and illegality, between the force of law and the power of crime, has ceased to exist, and his characters move through the bleak landscape of a moral no-man's land. The poker-playing underworld figures who hire Murphy to kill, turn out to be at the same time detectives in the local police force. His death at their hands is thus as arbitrary and meaningless as those of his victims: the killer is killed, but his end yields no moral significance. It is not the triumph of justice, honesty and truth; a victory for neither law nor crime, it characterizes a world where the two have become indistinguishable. The hero, too, fails to live up to his triumphal entry. He has all the sartorial and physical trappings of the Chicago mobster, but again something is missing. The vitality is gone, that dynamic drive, positive in itself but simply corrupted to base ends, that makes the hero-villains of films like Walsh's WHITE HEAT and THE ROARING TWENTIES sympathetic, even admirable, in their fierce self-assertion. They are conquistadors, passionate exponents of the individualist ethos, who simply have the misfortune to be born on the wrong side of the tracks, and an irreducible rebelliousness that prevents them from crossing over into respectability. Murphy is neither rebel, nor conqueror, nor passionate in anything; he appears emotionally and morally stunted, little more than a

Vietnam, for if the film looks back to an innocence and a self-assurance now lost, the Vietnam war is where America might be said to have lost both.

There is something rather facile about the criticism implied here - and in particular about the implicit equation of the American soldier with the American criminal - and if this were the main focus of the film, it could be dismissed as another, characteristically smug, European indictment of the 'Great Society'. It is to Fassbinder's credit that he goes further than this, to look critically at his *own* activity and cultural situation, with the result that the film becomes its own critique.

Murphy's visit to his mother dramatizes the meeting of two cultures which is the matrix of the film. The mother, aristocratic incarnation of Old World traditions, and the son, coldly functional product of the technological New, meet but find no contact. Between them hovers the neurotic figure of a permanently adolescent younger brother, who still contrives to see in Murphy a hero touched with the glamour of the old America and who is drawn to him by an admiration that verges on adulation. But even for him there can be no real contact. Murphy remains unapproachable, a stranger; and the younger brother is left to wander frenetically between the two emblems of opposing cultures carefully juxtaposed in the house, the pin-table and the piano, unable to reconcile himself exclusively to either. His admiration for Murphy and all that he stands for is not sustained by the present reality; it is arrested in the past just as his own development is arrested at the stage of insecure adolescence.

In this neurotically immature admirer of all things American, Fassbinder seems to parody his own fascination; and the self-criticism is made more explicit in the film's machine for killing, and he kills with the unfeeling perfectionism of the technician. When not on an assignment he is inert, reaching for the whisky bottle not out of an excess of animal vitality but merely mechanically, out of force of weary habit. He seems to represent a world reduced to machines and consumers; and when not active as the former, he is passive as the latter, prostrate on his hotel bed, ringing room-service for his food, his whisky and his women.

History, it seems, has overtaken the gangster hero and his relatively simple, manichean world. And in so far as THE AMERICAN SOLDIER radiates nostalgia, Fassbinder appears to be looking back with something like regret to that phase of American culture in which violent crime could seem almost innocent in its individualistic self-assertion, while its inevitable defeat only affirmed unquestioning faith in the rule of law and the rightness of the country's institutions. It is doubtless not without significance that Murphy is a veteran of final scene. Arriving with his mother just in time to see Murphy trapped and shot down, the younger brother throws himself on the body of his hero and, in an interminable slow-motion sequence, rolls around with him on the ground in front of the left-luggage lockers, to the accompaniment of the theme song 'So much tenderness'. It is a parody of a love scene, something approaching the act of love itself, but an act of love performed with a body that is unmistakably dead. The 'tenderness' is all to no avail: in more than the literal sense, the American gangster hero cannot be revived. To attempt a nostalgic re-creation is merely, in the end, to manipulate inert material.

This closing statement has an air of finality about it, and perhaps Fassbinder is here publicly drawing a line under his reworkings of American themes and genres. Only his new films will tell.

JOHN RIGNALL

THE RITE

RITEN (THE RITE). Sweden 1970. **Dir** Ingmar Bergman. **Sc** I.B. **Phot** Sven Nykvist. **Cast** Ingrid Thulin (Thea), Anders Ek (Sebastian), Gunnar Björnstrand (Hans), Eric Hell (judge). **Production** Svensk Filmindustri. **Dist** Darville Organization. 75 min.

In THE RITE Ingmar Bergman returns to the familiar emotional territory of 'the sensual longing for humiliation' (as one of his characters calls it) so fully explored in A PASSION. The positive and destructive patterns of guilt and abasement are developed in the claustrophobic form of a relatively short television film.

Bergman capitalises on the self-evident 'staginess' of television as a medium - its concentration on the foreground, the relative lack of movement, the insubstantial sets that are never more than a backdrop to create a sense that the film is a game, a ritual itself, a medium where the distinctions between actors and audience are breaking down like the culture from which they spring.

Significantly the most powerful image in this film is not visual but verbal - an image of islands that are simultaneously artificial places of security but also portents of approaching death - the clogging of process whose physiological analogue is that prime disease of modern civilisation, thrombosis.

'We are always having rows in which we are both actors and audience', says one of the characters bitterly. His bleak analysis cuts down to the motive behind such deliberately naked technique. The film is 'about' positions of weakness and positions of power, the dissolving relationship between actor and audience, between the man who condemns and the man condemned.

The film is divided into 'scenes' - recalling Bergman's method in A PASSION where the action is punctuated by interviews with each actor probing his sense of the character he is playing. And this stagey world is presented with a wry self-mockery on Bergman's part, an Eliotic quirk of self-parody creeping out of lines that are gnomic personal statements and rather 'what one expects' from a 'Bergman film'.

It is a work that calls into question the social mores behind judicial decisions of 'obscenity' delivered on works of art and probes the principle of 'judgement' itself - one of the great surviving fetishes of our civilised traditions, a 'rite' itself which has been disastrously compromised in the West by the collapse of moral universals.

The other rite in THE RITE is a sketch by three performers seeking to recapture the primitive mystery and terror of invoking a god immanent in nature. On one hand it is a cabaret piece one step from a strip show, on the other a genuine rite, a drive towards transcending the human, symbolised by savage, otherworldly bird masks worn by the men and the drinking of the image of the god's face reflected in a bowl of blood.

An ailing, ageing judge is called upon to determine whether the act is obscene under laws which he admits have lost their inner moral purpose. He explains to the performers: 'Our laws are antiquated but they must be enforced.' He is aware that he is dying, aware that his body's very smell be-

trays the fact. His 'old father' has just died, he is afraid and has no religious belief and little personal pride with which to face his own imminent death.

Like the judge, the three performers are severely disturbed, their close relationship together a lacerating dynamic of humiliation, hysteria and self-abasement. The oldest actor is an unwilling, accepting party to his wife's affair with his younger partner, who is possessed by obscure sadistic destructive drives. Early in the film we see these at work. After sporadic attempts at lovemaking and conversation in which both woman and man assume momentarily dominant roles, he sits in the middle of the hotel bed, running lighted matches along the edges of sheets the way one fires a newspaper. It is obscure, frightening and self-consciously staged. The next scene, unsinged, he is being interviewed by the judge.

The wife - dependent on her older husband, depended on by the younger man - is painfully vulnerable, a hysterical nymphomaniac who 'plays at being a saint and a martyr'. But Bergman is interested in process rather than character, with the forces generated in personal relationships rather than the fixities of mores, morals or laws.

In individual interviews with each performer the judge is placed in a different role - he is humiliated, the humiliator and finally, with the wife, a rather ineffectual rapist. Finally the rite is performed before him. There is no security in being an audience for him. He is struck before the performance begins and then the primitive terror and mystery is recaptured as he gazes on the face of the god mask on the woman's features - and dies of a heart attack.

In a nutshell this is the bad dream of the film - the return by art to the primitive springs of human culture, similar in trajectory to the self-destructive search for a new freedom undertaken by Mann's artist-figure, Adrien Leverkühn. It is a return that springs 'like a lily from the arsehole of a corpse' (in the words of one of Bergman's characters), out of the body of bourgeois society. It is at the same time the death blow to what remains of that culture and its surviving humanistic values, which are defined for Bergman by the predicament of the judge - without faith, with a failing belief in humane relationships as the only truth, yet prey to dehumanising lusts which link him fatally to the three performers.

The judge admits 'that even in my profession there are elements of cruelty' - the 'lust of cruelty' he calls it later. He realises the extent to which he is compromised. He acts sadistically but also demands to be punished and enjoys his own self-abasement within the carapace of his professional relationship to the case although he is deeply, unprofessionally involved - 'Perhaps I wanted to take part in it.' But despite his humiliation at the end of the film, when he is struck and abased before the actors, he remains a source of tenuous moral strength. He maintains some resources of pride in reason and his own dignity. 'You have struck me and humiliated yourself', he says.

Earlier in the film he goes to a church to 'talk to' a priest rather than confess. To a priest who can offer no help he poignantly reveals his own limited resources - a belief that the only 'warmth' in the world is within the 'frail ring' of human relationships, outside of which there is 'only cruelty'.

The profound conflict in the film is seen with some detachment by Bergman - the collusion between authoritarian reason in a compromised and dying form and a psychic anarchy which is only stabilised by what Fischer would call a 'false myth' and a decadent release from the problems of living or thinking.

Clinically objective, the film refuses to resolve the conflict. Bergman has no final comment on the 'rough beast' lurching to replace the dead judge and what he represents - some guilty decency, reluctant courage. There is a similar refusal to offer any but the most tenuous positives at the end of A PASSION - that film closes on a man unable to find a direction on a road as the medium gradually bleaches out and dissolves. He crouches finally to wait.

Such unrelenting rejection of hope has some courage. If we don't know where we stand, we should admit that - and stand.

JOHN TULLOCH

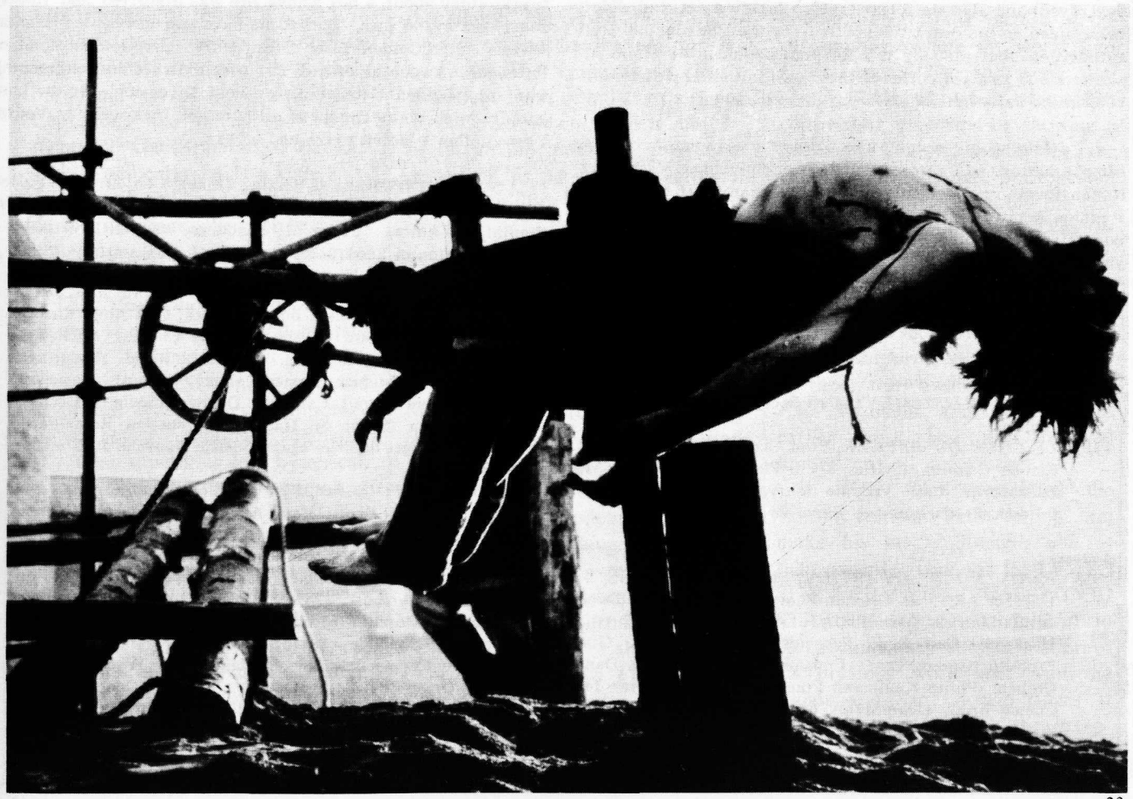
ANDREI RUBLEV

ANDREI RUBLEV. USSR 1966. **Dir** Andrei Tarkovski. **Sc** Andrei Mikhailov-Kontchalovski and A.T. **Phot** Vadim Youssav **Mus** V.Ortchinnikov. **Cast** A.Solonitzine (Rublev), N.Sergeev (Kirill), Irma Raouch (girl), N.Bowliaiev (Boriska). **Production** Mosfilm. Integral version 6 hrs.

The Soviet director, Andrei Tarkovsky, completed his latest feature film ANDREI RUBLEV in 1966. It had a long and difficult road to travel before it reached the screen. The story of the battle for its release runs as follows: after shooting was finished the film was subjected to strict censorship, which resulted in the excision of numerous shots. The effect was to make some of its sequences incoherent, and the film was the object of vehement attacks by some critics while it received accolades from a more discriminating public. It was barred from exhibition in the Soviet Union and may never have been seen anywhere, were it not for the fact that a print had inadvertently been sent to the 1969 Cannes Festival where it was screened 'hors concours'. ANDREI RUBLEV excited and moved all those present at the showing and was subsequently awarded the International Literary Critics' Prize (FIPRESCI). Only then did the representatives of Sovexportfilm agree to sell the picture to a French exhibitor. The print had barely reached Paris when the Soviet negotiators were on the telephone from Moscow demanding that the deal be cancelled. But it was too late. The commotion stirred up by this incident only created greater interest among the public.

ANDREI RUBLEV is a splendid historical canvas of an entire period of Russian history. The time is the 15th century. Russia is a poor, dark and hungry land, torn apart by dissent among its princelings and beset by the Mongol occupiers. But what we see is not only the superficial spectacle of a bygone age, but also its essence - the fate of Russia and its insulted and injured people. This is the film's background. The actual hero of the story is the monk and famous Russian icon-painter,

THE RITE



ANDREI RUBLEV

famous 'Trinity' icon. The film begins with a prologue - an early attempt at flying in a balloon over typical Russian landscapes. We don't know whether the audacious man remained alive. But the key to the film has been given: It is a film replete with scenes of savage cruelty - the eyes of builders who have fled from the Grand Prince to his rival brother's court are gouged, a jester's tongue is torn out, a man is crucified at a crossroads. The dark atmosphere of the film is underlined by the theme of rain and storm and only the end sequence, in vivid colour proclaims the triumph of religion. The film is deeply religious - it is, in fact, the first Soviet film of its kind. That is why it has had no release in Russia till now. The Soviet officials called it 'contrary to historical truth' - at least that was the 'explanation' given at the Belgrade Festival this year when ANDREI RUBLEV was cancelled at the last minute before the screening.

In Andrei Rublev's time religion was very important, the icons were religious pictures which communicated spiritual values to an illiterate people, and naturally the end of the film - the procession with the famous Trinity icon shown in big close-up and colour, was clearly intended as the magnificent affirmation of faith in Christ and gave an impression of a religious triumph which is now, in Russia, absolutely impossible.

RUBLEV is not historical-documentary, archeological, biographical or even an art-historical film. It is more like a free discussion of the spiritual evolution of the great icon-painter. A precise biographical film was hardly possible, because we know almost nothing about Rublev's life. Little remained except a few icons and his legendary fame. Therefore, Tarkovsky was right in basing everything on Rublev's art. The main question of the film is what has given Rublev in his dark time the power to create. The film hints at its deeper meaning, for instance, in the meeting of Rublev with the ghost of his teacher, Theophanes the Greek, shown without any mysticism. To Rublev's question - what the other world looks like? Theophanes answers - Not as you imagine. To Rublev's question - When the storm will end over Russia? - There is no answer ...

The director, Andrei Tarkovsky, now is regarded as one of the best Soviet film-makers. He graduated from the Cinema Institute (VGIK) in Moscow in 1961, and started with a 30-minute short film THE STEAM-ROLLER AND THE VIOLIN (1960) about the friendship between a seven-year-old boy violinist and a worker. The film is a romantic miniature reflecting the major influence of Albert Lamorisse. Tarkovsky's first feature film IVAN'S CHILDHOOD (1962) is the tragic story about a boy whose life was distorted and finally destroyed by the war. Both films have won many international prizes - the Golden Lion of St. Mark, the Golden Head of Palenque, a special award 'for poetic direction condemning war', the Golden Gate prize for Best Direction, for the best camera work (cameraman of all films of Tarkovsky is Vadim Yusov), the Selznick prize and others.

Now, Tarkovsky is making a feature colour film called SOLARIS from a novel by a Polish science fiction writer, Stanislaw Lemm. From all accounts, SOLARIS will be a Soviet version of 2001.

JEANNA VRONSKAYA

Gaining an insight into Rublev's personality was no simple matter, as Tarkovsky and the scriptwriter Mikhalkov-Konchalovski realized fully when they began their task. 'The Passion According To Andrei' (the original title of the picture) consists of ten episodes from the life of Andrei Rublev - his youth, the flowering of his genius, the creation of the world -

JACQUES RIVETTE: a filmography

shorts

1951 *QUADRILLE*. **Prod** Jean-Luc Godard. **Cast** J-L.G., Anne-Marie Cazalis. 16mm.

1952 *LE DIVERTISSEMENT*. **Cast** Sacha Briquet, Olga Waren. 16mm.

1956 *LE COUP DU BERGER*. **Prod** Claude Chabrol. **Scr** J.R., Claude Chabrol, Charles Bitch. **Phot** Charles Bitch. **Mus** F.Couperin. **Cast** Virginie Vitry, Anne Doat, Etienne Loinop. **Production** Les Films de la Pléiade.

features

1958 *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (PARIS BELONGS TO US). **Scr** J.R., Jean Gruault. **Phot** Charles Bitch. **Ed** Denise de Casablanca. **Mus** Philippe Arthuys. **Sound** Christian Hackspill. **Cast** Betty Schneider (Anne Goupil), Giani Esposito (Gérard Lenz), Francoise Prevost (Terry), Daniel Crohem (Philip Kaufman), François Maistre (Pierre), Jean Claude Brialy (Jean-Marc). **Production** AJYM (Les Films du Carosse). 140 min.

1965 *LA RELIGIEUSE* (THE NUN). **Scr** J.R., Jean Gruault, from Diderot. **Ass. Dir** Jean Fourastié. **Phot** Alain Levent. **Sound** Guy Villette. **Dec** Jean-Jacques Fabre. **Mus** Jean-Claude Eloy. **Ed** Denise de Casablanca. **Cast** Anna Karina (Suzanne), Liselotte Pulver (Mme de Chelles), Micheline Presle (Mme de Moni), Francine Bergé (Soeur St Christine), Christine Lenier (Mme Simonin), Francisco Rabal (Dom Morel), Catherine Diamant (Soeur St Cecile), Yori Bertin (Soeur St Thérèse). **Production** Rome-Paris Films, Georges de Beauregard, Société Nouvelle du Cinéma. 129 min.

1968 *L'AMOUR FOU*. **Scr** J.R., Marilou Parolini. **Ass. Dir** Jean Fourastié. **Phot** (35mm) Alain Levent, (16mm) Etienne Becker. **Sound** (35mm) Bernard Aubouy, (16mm) Jean-Claude Laurent. **Mus** Jean-Claude Eloy. **Ed** Nicole Lubritansky. **Cast** Bulle Ogier (Claire), Jean-Pierre Kalfon (Sebastien/Pyrrhus), Josée Dertoop (Marta/Hermione), Michèle Moretti (Michèle), Celia (Celia/Andromaque), Françoise Godde (Francoise/Cleone), Maddly Bomy (Maddly/Cephise), Liliane Bordam (Puck), Yves Beneyton (Yves/Orestes/Pylade), Dennis Berry (Dennis/Pylade/Oreste), Michel Delahaye (Michel/Phoenix), André S. Labarthe (TV-director). **Production** Cocinor-Marceau, Sogexportfilm, Georges de Beauregard. Integral version 4 hrs 12 min.

ERMANNO OLMI

the ethic of individual responsibility by Martin Walsh.

"To become involved with a work of art entails, to be sure, the experience of detaching oneself from the world. But the work of art itself is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched".[1]

I. Ermanno Olmi is the direct heir of the Italian neorealist tradition, despite his lack of any actual cinematic contact with that stream: "My discovery of the cinema had not been when I first set eyes on a camera and lighting equipment, but when I discovered neorealism and the possibility of the cinema for exploring life".[2]

Olmi's description of his stylistic and thematic origins is clearly borne out by his films, and Pierre Leprohon, like others, has commented: "Olmi apparaissait l'un des seuls à demeurer fidèle à cette mission du néoréalisme: peindre la vie de tous les jours, chercher le pathétique des destins, non pas nécessairement médiocres, mais modestes".

This description of neorealism ignores some of its central characteristics: for instance, its tendency toward ideological commitment, and its protest against the contemporary Italian social conditions. Thematically Olmi's work is less hysterical, more maturely considered and reflective than the films of the first neorealist period, 1945–50. In method, however, it has closer affinities: Luigi Chiarini suggests that in the classic neorealist film "The plot becomes simpler, almost disappears in open narration intent on seizing—in situations rather than in episodes—man, his condition, the background against which he acts, historically determined".[4]

This is certainly true of Olmi's cinema, in which the emphasis is not on events, but on people, and their relationship to their environment: the dual themes of work and nature are recurrent motifs in his examination of man's surrender to commercially orientated society, a surrender which has as its concomitant the loss of the creative instinct. Intellectually, Olmi is in strong contrast to his neorealist predecessors. Not only is there a total lack of didactic political commitment, but his social commentary (in IL POSTO, for example) focusses not on the evils of an unwieldly, stifling bureaucratic machinery, but upon the responsibility of each individual for his own life. This emphasis is clearly consistent with Olmi's experience of his environment, and it may be useful at this point to give some details of his personal background, as there is little in English on his career.

II. Olmi was born in 1931, of peasant/worker stock. His father died during the war, and Olmi and his mother both commenced to work at the Edisonvolta Company in Milan shortly afterwards. During these years as a clerk (a period which is delicately recalled in IL POSTO) Olmi developed an interest in the theatre, studying acting for a while, and gaining a technical expertise in his work as stage manager of several amateur comedies and musicals, such as Bossano's *Pelicano Ribelle*, Labiche's *Un Capello di Paglia di Firenze* (*The Italian Straw Hat*), Giradoux's *L'Apollon de Bellac*, and even Thornton Wilder's *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* (translated as *Felice Viaggio*). That his work in the theatre was important to his film career only in his acquisition of technical knowledge is clear from the total absence of theatrical effect in his feature films and (presumably) his short documentary films, which he commenced making in 1953, when he joined the film section of the Edison Company. In the next eight years he completed about 40 documentaries for Edison (none of which I've seen). This was his period of cinematic apprenticeship, and by all accounts his formative period both stylistically and thematically. Of these films, one critic has said that they give "an intelligent and frank picture of the surroundings where the workers of a big concern live and work, presenting different types of people, confronting problems or showing a profound comprehension for the small happenings that, put together, make up a life" Probably the best of these works are *La Diga de Ghiacciaio* (1954), *Mannon: Finestra due* (1956), *Tre Fili Fino a Milano* (1958), *Il Grande Paese d'Acciaio* (1960) and *Un Metro e Lungo Cinque* (1961). The last two of these won awards at Industrial Film Festivals, and some of his earlier work had also received limited critical recognition.

In 1959 Olmi persuaded the Edison company into letting him make his first full-length film at their expense. This was IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (TIME STOOD STILL) and remained faithful to the documentary subject matter of his previous work—and won the Cidale and San Giorgio prizes at Venice that year. With the exception of one film, E VENNE UN UOMO (A MAN CALLED

JOHN) (1965), in which he used Rod Steiger, Olmi has consistently adhered to the principals evinced in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO, and which derive from the neorealist tradition: unobtrusive camera work, and the use of non-professional actors. Olmi has explained his use of non-actors quite succinctly: "If I use professional actors as intermediaries, I lose the chance to convey the truth, because those actors are followed by the public not for the characters they represent on the screen, but because the actors themselves are a model of success in our society".[5]

Olmi's integrity here is mirrored in his attitude to the form and content of his films: "Many of our men of culture who wish to express their ideas through the cinema, end by debasing the medium in this way: they put over their 'message' in thrillers, erotic stories, romantic fables. This is not serious, indeed it is dishonest".[6]

Olmi's increasing control over his material evinces his essential seriousness: his most recent film, I RECUPERANTI, Olmi scripted, edited, and photographed himself. At no time has he followed any æsthetic or ideological cinematic creed, and has steered clear of the 'official' film industry, as he emphasised by his part in the founding of '24 Horses' and '22 Decembre'—two groups of young writers and technicians who came together in Milan to make intelligent pictures at low cost. Indeed the very names of the companies testify to their disavowal of grandiose commercial production.

III. The two themes of 'work' and 'nature' are tentatively formulated in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (1959). The film is a psychological examination of two men guarding a dam, against a backdrop of snow and mountains, and its two actors were the actual guardian of the dam, and a young man who worked on the administrative side of Edison. The physical setting of the drama is established at the outset: the ice, snow, mountains, dominating the little hut in which we witness the old man's meticulous ordering of his world; it is a severe failure of order when the clock stops—and we recognise it as such, as we are rapidly drawn into empathy with the old man's diligent responsiveness to his environment. The old man's world is one of habit, of geometric order (c.f. the precision of his laying the table for dinner), but it is not one that excludes awareness of his surroundings: note his setting of the animal trap after observing footprints in the snow. The arrival of the young boy as a replacement for the old man's usual colleague is the catalyst that provides the core of the film: the establishing of a real relationship between the two protagonists. The boy initially represents a total disruption of the established order: he hammers shelves, bounces on a squeaky bunk, rebuilds in grandoise fashion the old man's subtle animal trap; all this is observed with great warmth by Olmi; humour is the predominant mood. Stylistically it is characteristic Olmi; the camera is present simply as an observer, moves little, does not attempt to refashion events through cutting or unexpected angles. But its point of view is not static: in the opening scenes we are drawn into empathy with the old man; when the boy arrives we, too, feel jolted; but shortly we become more detached, we can laugh at both man and boy, because we watch from outside their specific situation. Thus when Olmi shows us first the old man furtively examining the boy's book, and then the boy examining the old man's book, we recognise Olmi's deliberate structuring of our point of view and response. But the sort of detachment we attain is far from the ascetic rigour of a Robert Bresson film: we move easily back into seeing the situation from the old man's point of view: thus when the boy plays his rock 'n roll record, the camera tilts and swivels, miming the old man's feelings, only regaining its customary stability when the record ends.

The old man is irritated by the disruption of his vision of order: he is unaware of the boy's difficulty in adapting to this new and isolated environment. It is only when the avalanche rumbles, that the old man senses the boy's unease. It is through the 'conflict' with the natural order, the avalanche which precipitates the power failure, and the snow storm, that they finally achieve understanding of each other. The power failure forces the two of them to drain water away by hand: for the first time their efforts are synchronised. And when they flee the hut in the snow-storm, and struggle to the church, they sleep with their heads on the same pillow, after the old man has taken on a role of father-figure to the disturbed and scared boy. The old man fully adopts this paternal role: when the torch battery goes flat, he lights the church candles, for the boy's peace of mind; and the following morning he carried the boy back to the hut, to spare him the cold. The final shot of the film is a long shot (our essential detachment from the lives of either one being stated again) of the hut, with the sound of the boy's rock music blaring out: now, however, the old man can accept it. He has been aroused from the complacency of his life of habit, and forced into a human relationship that takes him beyond the order imposed by his work. The old man's work (guarding a dam) has resulted in his adoption of a specific, exclusive life-style; the boy comes to work also (though his real intention, he claims, is to study (another sort of work)); this work is the one common factor between them, but is not, in itself, sufficient to provide a bond between them. Instead, the natural environment, the snow and the mountains, must bring them to an understanding they couldn't otherwise have attained.

IV. The motif of 'nature' plays almost no part in IL POSTO (1961), the first of Olmi's films to receive widespread critical recognition. At one point Domenico and Magali run through a park together, a moment that is in strong contrast to the predominantly technological and bureaucratic context of the rest of the film, but the rural environment has no further significance thematically; similarly in I FIDANZATI, the rain at the end, pointing to Giovanni's emotional resolution, acts as a cathartic metaphor for the establishment of a real relationship with his fiancee Liliana, but does not run as a motif

throughout the film. Instead, what we find in IL POSTO and I FIDANZATI is an emphasis upon the impingement of the commercial environment upon human relationships. In the case of IL POSTO, this results in a more oblique 'statement'. Olmi, while criticising the industrial world that depersonalises people (the desperate cry of the office worker, towards the end, "I've been working under this lamp for twenty years . . ."), simultaneously views it with remarkable sympathy. Domenico, the central figure, does not undergo any change of awareness during the course of the film, which spans the time between his application for a job, and the allocation to him of a desk, at which he will probably sit for much of his life.

The film's central theme is the frustration of human feelings by the social context, work: the relationship between Domenico and Magali sadly fades away, as they are unable to meet at work: their lunch-breaks are at different times, she dares not stop to talk to him for long for fear of upsetting her boss. Structurally, the influence of the environment, and the relationship between Domenico and Magali is carefully modulated. The film opens with Domenico's family, crowded in a small house, worrying about 'the job': it is a crucial day, for a job equals money, equals economic survival. The applicants for the job are examined in a huge gilded hall that seems to mock at their lowly aspirations. At lunch-time Domenico meets Magali, and the potential for a meaningful human interaction emerges, set against a more austere backdrop, such as the man in the café, reading a newspaper that headlines only violence and depression.

Back at the interviews, the reality of their relationship is put into focus by contrast with the interviewer's ludicrous questioning: "Does your future seem hopeless . . . Did you wet your bed as a child". But it is this latter tone of impersonal triviality that increasingly dominates the film, as the potentiality of Domenico's affair with Magali disintegrates. The long corridors of the office, the scraping subservience of the doormen to their superiors, the blank wall at which Domenico

IL POSTO

stares for his first days of sterile 'work' leads only to the impotence of the New Year's Eve Dance. The hall is huge and empty, with Domenico a lone figure, still, pathetically, in his raincoat (the raincoat which had looked so fine in the shop window when he was with Magali, and which now, on his frail body, reveals only the discrepancy between the hope and the reality). Like Antonioni, Olmi will not abbreviate the sequence, but makes us wait and wait, with Domenico, for more people to fill fill the hall; and even when they do arrive, we experience the tedium and disillusion, rather than having it presented to us through deft editing of events. The office staff do their best to enjoy themselves, the band-leader hopelessly exhorts them to make this "a night we must never forget", but the overwhelming tone is one of stultification, fear of communication, of couples dancing in a shyly insinuating manner.

The disintegration of real personal contact continues in the final section of the film; a clerk dies, and his desk is cleared. He had been attempting to write a novel in his lonely life outside the office; a couple of chapters are in his desk, and are, predictably, incomprehendingly tossed aside. Then a pathetic squabble over the desk occurs, before the final shot of Domenico sitting at his desk, with the desultory mechanical clanking of the duplicator presaging the monotonous anonymity of his years ahead; the possibility of anything else has been eroded away during the course of the film.

What, then, is the positive element of the film? It lies, I think, in the nature of Olmi's vision, not in his ability to create a sense of thwarted human potential, but in his recognition of the essential humour that can rise above the objective physical situation, towards an emotionally **alive** response to the environment. It is the very humourlessness of the office world that precludes meaningful communication. Olmi has said "Work is not a damnation for man. It is his chance to express himself, the average person's opportunity to be creative. But work as it is organised becomes a condemnation. It annuls man".[7]

In IL POSTO, work 'annuls man', because man resigns himself to a total passivity within the machine; he cannot even laugh at himself. Olmi's gentle humour (the fat man staring at an equally huge bottle of wine in a shop window, a clerk solemnly cutting cigarettes in half in order to 'economise') is born of detachment, a standing away from the event, to see it for what it is. No character in IL POSTO achieves this detachment (apart

from the cynical clerk), but that it is necessary is emphasised by the fact that in Olmi's subsequent films (A MAN CALLED JOHN excepted) the change that takes place in the protagonist is always brought about by his standing back and looking in upon his situation from a point of detachment.

V. This is precisely the process of I FIDANZATI (1963), whose opening reiterates the dance motif of IL POSTO, in a very similar mood; it forms the credit sequence, the dance hall gradually fills up with people sitting around the edge of the sawdusted floor; everyone looks glumly on as the blind pianist is led in, and the overweening air of sterility and sadness continues as the dancers commence to shuffle crisply, mechanically around the hall. There is however one factor that distinguishes this episode from its predecessor in IL POSTO; although the air of melancholy remains, Giovanni, the protagonist of the film, is in restrospect to see this occasion with affection, as a significant connection with his fiancee Liliana, whom he leaves behind in Milan when he takes up a new job in Sicily. Their relationship has subsided into routine, lacks spontaneity, and it is only when Giovanni enters an unfamiliar environment—the harsh factory landscapes of newly industrialised Sicily—that he begins to rediscover his real intuitive emotions towards Liliana. It is the rebirth of their love for each other that provides the narrative core of the film, but it is structured far more complexly than either IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO or IL POSTO. The crucial innovation is what has been termed the 'flashback', but this is not precisely true: what we witness are present-time memories in the minds of Giovanni and Liliana; we remain in the same time-scale throughout the film, and witness the evolution of their thoughts and feelings in chronological continuity. Nevertheless, the use of this form by Olmi marks a new mode of psychological exposition in his work that always evades the self-consciousness of, for instance, Resnais, while evincing a discreetly profound awareness of the working of the mind.

As Giovanni struggles to come to terms with his new job, he recalls incidents of his past: the dance, whose piano and accordion music pervades much of the film, providing an essential continuity throughout: a carnival in Milan the previous year that he enjoyed with Liliana. The gentle 'togetherness' of these past events contrasts with the deserted café that blares its music to no one, with the bleak impersonality of his hotel, and its empty dining-rooms. Throughout the film the camera observes events very much from Giovanni's point of view, hence emphasising the alienation he feels in this strange environment. His responses to this stark world are painstakingly followed through: his alienation is established through the slow pace of the action, his awe at the size and grandeur of movement of the machines. At one point there is an accident, and an ambulance arrives to fetch the injured worker. our view of the episode is Giovanni's, we see the ambulance arrive in the yard way below us, and like Giovanni, we are not allowed a glimpse inside the ambulance. We experience his detachment from events around him.

Olmi's characteristic humour also plays its part; in the hotel for instance, we watch Giovanni tentatively begin to join in some light-hearted horseplay in the corridors—but before he even does anything he is 'caught in the act' by an angry guest: we laugh even while recognising his essential exclusion from the camaraderie of his fellow-workers. Gradually he begins to feel more at home in this environment, but its concomitant is the re-establishment of his relationship with Liliana, first by postcard, then by letter, and finally by phone: their recognition of their need for each other is only due to Giovanni's initial detachment from his accustomed habitat, as I suggested initially. At the same time we note the recurrence of the 'work' motif: work is clearly seen as not being a self-sufficient mode of existence, human relationships being of paramount importance. In this sense, I FIDANZATI is conceptually an advance on IL POSTO, as the relations between work and emotion are clearly stated: only when there exists a spiritual contact between people, can a viable working situation be established. Stated bluntly like this, the film may appear intellectually clichéd, but when the conceptual intentions are as delicately integrated with the narrative structure as Olmi achieves, we can only wonder at the subtle penetration of his mind, whose art seems almost dedicated to concealing his art, such is the discretion of his touch.

VI. The discretion of Olmi's finest art was emphasised by its absence in A MAN CALLED JOHN (1965), a film that through its atypicality of subject and structure suggested the strength of Olmi at his best. His first feature film in colour, it attempted to tell the story of Pope John XXIII played by Rod Steiger. Olmi admits the film's failure: "My mistake was in trying to make a film that was all thought. You can't just put a man sitting there and try to convey his thoughts with words and images of the places he lived".

The characteristic languid pace is lacking, as Olmi tries to give a total impression of the Pope's entire life, instead of committing himself to a thorough examination of a single episode (as in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO, I RECUPERANTI, etc.). The attempts to link John's travels in Bulgaria (when he was a Bishop) to his youth via flashbacks to his peasant family lack **dramatic** motivation (unlike I FIDANZATI or UN CERTO GIORNO) while reasserting the theme of spiritual wealth as derivative of humble closeness to nature: the consequence of this uneasy imposition of thematic demands upon the film's form is a tendency toward sentimentality. Similarly, Olmi's use of yellow, red and green filters over black and white newsreel footage betrays an uncharacteristic hesitancy toward his material. Too often, as in John's spiritual doubts, his feelings of mortification and humiliation, we feel a ponderously unrealised dramatic intent on Olmi's part. Nevertheless there are sequences of beauty in the first half of the film; these principally reside in the superb evocation of John's peasant origins, the authentic vineyard scenes, the carnival processions, the religious ceremonies of the humble peasant world. All this bears the unassuming, honest quality of an ethnographic documentary. Gradually, however, the honesty and humility of these peasants becomes sentimentalised as Olmi attempts a conceptual equation between the peasants' integrity and the spiritual striving of the young Pope—John's white robes as he hunts pumpkins with his friends acquires unfortunate symbolic overtones that hang over too much of the film. The lesson of A MAN CALLED JOHN for Olmi was clear, and emphasises the nature of his artistic gift: his ability to communicate the essence of human situations with which he can identify. The life of the Pope proved to be a subject where Olmi's lack of first-hand experience resulted in over-schematisation of the narrative. His return to the world of the Edison company in UN CERTO GIORNO (1968) marked a return to the sources of his inspiration, and is his only film to date that deals with the life of the executive, rather than the humble employee.

VII. One of the themes of A MAN CALLED JOHN, the superiority of spiritual health over material wealth is initially inverted in UN CERTO GIORNO, at any rate in the eyes of the protagonists, who are concerned with gaining a lucrative commission for their advertising agency. By the end of the film, however, Bruno has been forced into a position of detachment from this environment, through a car accident, and has to a certain extent reasserted the necessity for mental fitness, self-awareness. This self-awareness mitigates against simple optimism, as the final shots of the film suggest: Bruno sits exhausted, watching television, on which we see first a drill pounding, then the image judders as the vertical hold on the screen is maladjusted: the image thus insistently repeats itself, before we see an explosion in the landscape. The parallel between Bruno's mental state and the physical devastation of the land is clear, though there is also implicit

a qualified optimism: the explosions clearing the land may make way for a finer environment, just as Bruno's evolving awareness of his condition may lead to a superior 'quality of life'. The close relationship between the individual and the social condition that is postulated in this closing sequence is evident throughout the film, and is structurally closer than in his previous work, more closely woven into the narrative progression.

This statement may be clarified by reference once again to the theme of nature. In A MAN CALLED JOHN Nature appears as the necessary ethnic background to a man of spiritual vitality; in UN CERTO GIORNO, the countryside is seen as something that is external to the commercial context, but desirable. Bruno has a house in Tuscany, where he can retire for weekends, with his dogs. Olmi's attitude to these sequences is curiously, but explicably, ambivalent. On the one hand there is the affectionately lyrical photography of the countryside, the misty beauty of Tuscany; associated with images of vitality (the dogs, the horses, the girls). On the other hand, the tensions and sickness of the business world, embodied in Bruno, and its implicit distortion of values casts a pall over the inherent romanticism of the sequence. Bruno, manifestly, has not got an easy 'relationship' with his country

retreat. In fact Olmi clearly gives us a series of opposites to balance off against each other; this operates not simply on the existential level of city/country, but also in terms of his stylistic presentation. The early scene at the conference table has a remarkable vigour, particularly in its editing—but it is a vigour that deliberately confuses, disorientates. It is mimetic of Davoli's collapse; we see the flashing projector, faces, then an out-of-focus shot of his own face, gradually readjusting into focus—it is a very precise way of conveying Davoli's feeling of nausea and confusion. The exhaustive vigour of all this is in strong contrast to the natural vigour of Tuscany. The connection between the two is made explicit by the image of the dogs, who are in a cage and have to be let out—a move from restrictive vitality to unfettered vitality. The implication is that Bruno must undergo a similar release, in order to rediscover "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower". Not that Bruno is to attain any idyll; on the contrary, his new awareness will be a sobering one—but it will have integrity, rather than self-deception as its root.

Our point of view of Bruno is not always detached: Olmi retains his ability to make us experience **with** Bruno—as in the car accident

which is the crux of the film. Like Bruno, we are not aware of the accident until after the event (hence we, like the jury, tend to clear him of guilt). Our identification with Bruno in the accident leads us to a fuller comprehension of his self-questioning afterwards, as the precariousness of his position becomes apparent; this is assisted by Olmi's development of his quasi-flashback technique. Where in A MAN CALLED JOHN we watched John, as he recalled incidents of his childhood, in an intellectually static manner, in UN CERTO GIORNO the technique is used to delineate Bruno's evolving comprehension of events: past occurrences now appear in new light in his mind, as we witness his engagement with the bases of his previously self-deluding life.

The idea that we only become aware of **how** we live, **who** we are, when something serious happens is not only reiterated verbally; after the hauntingly tender flashbacks, there arises a new delicacy, discretion in Bruno's relationships with people—the night watchman at the factory, the doctor. The frail innocence of Bruno's daughter, dark-haired and beautiful, somehow crystallises Bruno's new cognition, while counterpointing his essential sadness. We find a similar effect in the presentation of Bruno's home: visually, there is a new precision of outline, for instance the green bottle and glass which stand out against the cream tile background: this clarity is at once at odds with Bruno's spiritual confusion, while suggesting the new clarity of vision he is in the process of attaining. Bruno's dignity is counterpointed with the pompous inventiveness of the lawyers, whose witty romanticisation of both language and events increasingly reveals their moral deviousness.

VIII. Olmi's method, the technique of his narrative exposition reaches a new level of sophistication in its fusion of visual and thematic motifs, in UN CERTO GIORNO, while remaining true to his characteristic mode. This stylistic complexity is not present in Olmi's most recent film, I RECUPERANTI (1969) which he made for television. Thematically, however, it remains true to Olmi's 'œuvre', in some ways returning to the dramatic situation of IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (an encounter between an older and a younger man). But the concept of 'communion with nature' is here quite explicit, placing the concept of work directly within the natural environment: the two scavengers search for scrap metal, principally bomb shrapnel, on the green mountain sides. The characteristic situation of detachment from one's accustomed habitat, is established at the outset: Gianni returns home after the war, to find the family unit ruptured, for Gianni's father has married a woman many years his junior, a fact Gianni cannot accept; and his brother is on the point of emigrating to Australia. Along with this disorientation there is the problem of work: there is none without the requisite 'authorization': work is seen by the state not as a means of self-expression, but purely as an economic/bureaucratic necessity (the lumberjacks are not allowed to fell trees).

In contrast to the strictures of bourgeois conformity, we meet Old Du, the old scavenger, who is "against all boundaries", and whose context is the sheerly physical environment of rocks, boulders, trees and water. Self-expression is at a premium: sound is an act of freedom—one can shout, sing, one can push boulders down mountains for the pure exhilaration it affords. Old Du's ethic is to live for the moment—but it is an ethic of integrity that contrasts sharply against the attitude of Gianni's girl-friend, who won't accept her man's scavenging as being a job—though Gianna won't at this point relinquish his new-found dignity. Old Du's eyes "see under the stones" — beyond the surface appearances, and this is a faculty that is the result of experience, the gradual acquisition of knowledge that gives meaning to life. All this is not without humour (Gianni attempting to introduce an element of 'technology' into their scavenging) or irony: they are working, for instance, on ground where many men have trod, the grass is so green because it grows on human flesh, the carnage of war and man's follies. But even the life of Old Du is not without danger: the danger of unexploded bombs—but this very risk is one justification for living: "against knowledge is fate" and "we never have enough knowledge" says Old Du, justifying his dismantling of the bombs.

Gianni relinquishes his partnership with Old Du, and returns to the village to work on a building site, and reclaim the affections of his girl-friend. Old Du finds him there, they argue, and Old Du returns to the mountains, singing to the hills. The ending is perhaps ambiguous: but Gianni's rejection of scavenging as a way of life is not so much a rejection of its metaphysical values, as it is an absorption of those values into his attitudes. Gianni's re-entry into what Old Du terms "the stupid bourgeois" is from a new vantage of self-knowledge and spiritual health: Gianni is in some way "a new man", just as Old Du is the embodiment of what Olmi cries out for in his films: a man who maintains a creative relationship with his work, and thus fulfils himself.

Thematically I RECUPERANTI is the summation of Olmi's work, in his examination of the complex relationship between man, work, the natural environment, and the responsibility of each individual for the qualitative nature of that relationship. The formal prerequisite of the protagonist's detachment, isolation, from his habitual milieu (whether a mental or physical detachment), is present as in the earlier films, and provides the 'alienation' necessary for man to achieve a new and vital comprehension of his existence. These are the schematic bases of Olmi's films; as we have seen, each film approaches these bases from a different angle, but their essential pertinence to an understanding of the work of this gentle master in the tradition of Renoir is manifest.

NOTES
1. Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p.28, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1967.
2. 'Ermanno Olmi: a conversation with John Francis Lane', Sight and Sound, Vol. 39, No. 3.
3. Pierre Leprohon, 'Le Cinema Italien', p.214, Editions Seghers, Paris, 1966.
4. Luigi Chiarini, entry on 'Neorealism', from Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo.
5. 'Ermanno Olmi: a conversation with John Francis Lane', loc. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid
8. Ibid

Cinema and Politics

French Film Culture and Critical Theory

Cinéthique

Although a bridge isn't built so that people can commit suicide from it, there will always be those who insist on using it to this end.
Cinéthique, No. 6.

One of the more engaging features of contemporary French criticism is the way in which structuralism and semiology are giving a new impulse to an old ambition: to get to grips with the real world by trying to catch it in the 'simulacrum' of a descriptive-analytical paraphrase. Around this effort a mythology is taking shape—that of rendering social facts transparent, legible, and as a consequence, amenable to change—which casts an interesting light on the still predominantly Hegelian drift and inspiration of French intellectual life.

Not that the secret aspiration of turning the world into a book was ever explicitly stated, it has to be read 'between the lines' of a figurative - metaphorical language that speaks of 'texte', 'écriture', 'lisibilité', and it announces itself by the modest disclaimers which (oddly enough) accompany the ever-swelling flow of elucidatory prose in journals and magazines like a leitmotif: "More work needs to be done"—"il y a ici un travail à faire qui ne s'est pas encore fait" are phrases emerging in semiological writing as regularly as the snorkel of a skin-diver coming up for air. It is only a pity that breath is taken too often at a juncture in the argument where the more sceptical reader expects some kind of pay-off for his own pains, if only in the form of an applicable critical proposition or a verifiable concrete example. Such a disappointed reader is evidently starting from quite different cultural and intellectual premisses.

For the assumption that there exists a totality to be constituted gives rise to the hope that any lacunæ in exegesis, any pockets of resistence against limpid transparency, so to speak, will be flushed out in time, so long as the common pursuit is steadily kept in view, which is, to lay the groundwork of a future epistemological 'architecture', by conducting—to use another recurrent metaphor—an 'archæology' of the present. Others, more meticulous in their very ambitiousness, are stonemasons working on a cathedral: they may never hope to see the completed edifice, but they have at least chiselled their own slab to perfection.

In England (with one or two exceptions) no such mythology, or any comparable pride in intellectual craftsmanship has yet started to blossom. Some may count this a blessing, others are deploring the excessive modesty of an intellectual tradition which has made speculative thinking a thoroughly disreputable mental habit. So widespread is this aversion to any form of system-building here that, say, a debate as to whether the cinema is an art-form like literature or painting, a communication system like radio or television, or an ideological tool serving the bourgeoisie, would be virtually meaningless, since it is only within a general critical theory that these options assume some kind of poignancy.

This debate, however, about use and function of the cinema, is taking place with renewed vigour in France, and although the respective fronts seem perhaps still blurred with the smoke of battle, anyone concerned about the state of film-criticism (which after all, is one legitimate way of being concerned about the state of the modern cinema) could do worse than acquaint himself with some of the basic points at issue. At the same time, the difference in mood and critical temper among intellectuals in France compared with that of their British counterparts, especially the feeling of confidence in getting nearer towards a comprehensive critical theory, on which, however, a doctrinaire and somewhat uptight political commitment is uneasily grafted (resulting from the sharp politicisation of literature and the arts in the wake of May '68)—has to be taken into account when pronouncing verdict on some of the more recondite topics opposing French cinéphiles. Importing ideas from abroad is always a hazardous business—like bringing a bottle of rouge ordinaire back from a holiday. By the time you want to drink it, your wine has very likely turned to vinegar. And without anything comparable to 'les événements' in this country, a lot of what, for example, Louis Althusser has to say, tastes very dry indeed.

In Paris, on the other hand, Althusser's work on the fundamentals of Marxist epistemology, his efforts to clarify the logical foundations of dialectical materialism by distinguishing more rigorously between what is 'scientific' and what is 'ideological' in traditional Marxist philosophy, has had an impact on literary and æsthetic thought which obviously corresponds to a social experience wanting clarification. With it goes a reappraisal of the function of culture in a 'non-idealist' (theory of) society, basing itself on a critique of present-day culture and its philosophical implications. Among Althusser's more extreme disciples, this has become a somewhat obsessive 'search and destroy' mission, with forays into the social myths, attitudes, reflex-responses, artistic conventions, values, concepts, etc. that are deemed ideologically infested (i.e. constituted in structural analogy to bourgeois-capitalist economic practice). The

cinema, halfway between highbrow cultural fetish and cheap mass entertainment, national-international industry reeking with money as well as medium for individual artistic expression, is of course an almost irresistible target for such an ideological critique, especially if one accepts—as some of these critics do—the enormously formative influence which the cinema exerts on the visual imagination, and by extension, on the structuring of the unconscious mind. The usefulness of this kind of work for any general theory of society is without doubt considerable, and it is a field where semiologists are making a significant contribution. The question is, whether a particular film is nothing but an ideologically saturated "message", and whether from such an analysis any prescriptive rules can be deduced about what kind of films we ought to have (make), if we want to change society. But first to the evidence . . .

In spite of the habitually left-wing orientation of massive areas in France's intellectual geography, it is nonetheless surprising to see that the three most polemically-minded film magazines (*Positif, Cahiers du Cinéma, Cinéthique*) are all now sharing political views which in this country would count as Marxist—a fact that does nothing to reduce the surfaces of mutual friction. While *Positif* represents a generation of non-CP Marxists and socialists whose critical views and preferences have been cemented by numerous ideological and political skirmishes (especially against the *nouvelle vague*), and who have remained unimpressed by semiology, and largely sceptical vis à vis Althusser when applied to the cinema, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* have been egging each other on to wilder and wilder revolutionary fervour, ever since *Cinéthique* was founded late in 1968 by a group which (then) had close association with *Tel Quel*. This literary magazine attached to the prestigious Seuil publishing house is dedicated to what it calls a 'materialist' theory of literature, and is headed by Phillipe Sollers, who (not the only paradox of the French scene) has (or had?) as two devoted followers the intrepid Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, the present editors of the ideologically refurbished *Cahiers*. Under the tutelage of *Tel Quel, Cinéthique* began to fight for a 'proletarian, materialist' cinema.

Strategical alliances and factional splits within the various neo-Marxist groups (to which one has to add *Change* and *Preuves*, along with *Tel Quel* and the two film journals) are apparently as easily made as they are resolved, and if there is somewhere among semiologues and structuralists a sense of community, of critics and artists working on an identical task and inspired by a similar goal (which one is occasionally tempted to envy), there is also an even more apparent rivalry that has a way of exploding into demarcation disputes and dog-fights of staggering passion. Certainly, it helps to give a personal edge to the diverse theoretical axes being ground—so much so that for example in an article entitled "Du Bon Usage de la Valeur d'Echange—les *Cahiers du Cinéma* et le Marxisme-Leninisme" (*Cinéthique* No. 6) the author, Marcelin Pleynet, frequently refers to himself by his surname, in the course of an argument designed to demonstrate that *Cahiers* are abusing his 'texts' by trading them unfairly as an exchange value on the stock-market of literary reputations. In such a tense atmosphere a critic is likely to feel himself shooting down a river already gurgling with rapids, while there are plenty of people around who not only take the trouble, but visibly the pleasure to rock his boat as vigorously as they can. No wonder that occasionally he will hang on to what, from a more dispassionate point of view, are straws in the wind.

High-spirited polemical campaigns have of course an established place in France's cultural tradition. They are conducted, despite the occasional savagery, according to pretty well accepted rules, and they possess a kind of cyclical, ritualistic quality. For example, Pleynet in the said article is accusing *Cahiers* of illegitimately taking the position of *Tel Quel* in order to foist on *Cinéthique* the role of *La Quinzaine Littéraire* from a previous passage of arms. Nonetheless, the principal target of the last two years, *Cahiers*, and in particular the much-harassed Comolli, is navigating an especially frail craft. Once the stronghold of a phenomenologically defined, existentialist oriented criticism inherited from André Bazin, and often uncharitably ridiculed for confusing in its delirious pieces the screen of the Cinematheque Rue d'Ulm with the tabernacle of Notre-Dame, *Cahiers du Cinéma* have taken their left-left course in '69, after quite a long period of relative uncertainty in the middle ground of the extended interview—a form of cinéphilism which vis à vis the various 'jeunes cinemas', the Underground, the Cinema Nôvo all but usurped the place of critical analysis in the magazine.

Thus, the suspicion that the Marxist-Leninist line of the present équipe was adopted partly to avoid getting buried in the ideological landslide of '68 has not been entirely dispelled by lengthy editorials (see No. 216/217, reprinted in *Screen*, Spring 1971), assuring the readers that present policy has naturally developed from their work in preceding years, and that it represented the beginning of a thorough review of *Cahiers'* position and aims. *Positif* took this opportunity to renew, with considerable relish, the old quarrel (see *Positif* No. 122, "Les Enfants du Paradigme" by Robert Benayoun, and *Cahiers'* rejoinder in No. 124) which had around 1962 (in the days of the Algerian war) come to a head in a damaging and now famous attack on the pseudo-theological tenets underlying Bazin's conception of the cinema (*Positif* Nos. 46 and 47 "Les Délices de l'Ambiguité—Eloge à André Bazin" by Gérard Gozlin, partly reprinted in P. Graham, *The New Wave*, Cinema One, 1968).

Both *Positif* and *Cinéthique* (though otherwise hardly on speaking terms) are still waiting insistently for *Cahiers'* autocritique, promised in '69, and have, in the meantime, accused the editors of practicing an unprincipled, free-for-all leftism, which is incoherent on the level of theory, because the old critical laxness and inexactitude has simply been dressed up in a fashionably

semiotic vocabulary (*Positif*), and of pandering to an individualist *anarchisant* left-wing deviationism, particularly in the films they approve of (*Cinéthique;* à propos a *Cahiers* interview with Marco Ferreri: "entreprise de recupération [gauchiste] qui se fonde sur l'ignorance éperée des lecteurs . . ." —No. 6 p.3). Since then, the constellation has shifted yet again: after Benayoun's scathing piece in *Positif*, it is now *Cinéthique, Cahiers* and *Tel Quel* who have temporarily made common cause in order to defend Marxism-Leninism against *Positif's* allegedly social-democratic reformism.

To what extent *Cahiers* has in fact held its own as a serious film magazine during the last six years after the American cinema was officially given the coup de grâce (see *Cahiers* No. 172, Nov. 1965 "Vingt Ans Après"), we hope to discuss in a future article. Here we are chiefly concerned with *Cinéthique*, being a relative newcomer, and the least accessible of the three in Britain. Nos. 5 and 6 seem to be the most instructive, in so far as they set out explicitly to systematize the contributions of the previous issues, and make an attempt to outline a general position. (No. 9/10, another policy issue, was unfortunately not available for closer study at the time of writing.)

If *Cahiers* may be faulted for its eclecticism regarding the films it chooses to review, and a certain cavalier way in which it used to fabricate an auteur one day, only to throw him to the dogs the next ("A bas John Ford—vive William Wyler" is still *Cahiers'* most notorious critical blunder), no comparable latitude of judgement can be detected in *Cinéthique*, which—with a ruthless purism that inspires awe—has only admitted the following films into its pantheon (even Eisenstein's work is flawed by an inexcusable idealism): MEDITERRANNEE, OCTOBRE A MADRID, LE JOUEUR DE QUILLES, UN FILM COMME LES AUTRES—all made in recent years and by people (Godard included) more or less close to the magazine itself. (However, it seems that MEDITERRANNEE, hitherto the *cheval de bataille* in the fight for a materialist cinema, has now fallen into disgrace).

Whether the difficulties facing the reader when confronted with *Cinéthique's* remorselessly theoretical articles are due to the new ground which it claims to be breaking, or to a penchant for a style of writing that tends to be bluntly assertive and wildly generalising where one would like it to be analytical, and perversely limiting in its terminology where the avowed intention is to be precise, is probably a point worth arguing in a British context, but not necessarily decisive in France, where the discursive methods of empiricism are not universally regarded as superior. In view of this, neither the intricate verbal tracery which often seems to shroud fairly simple propositions in *Cinéthique* (apparently *de rigeur* if one claims to be scientific), nor the high pitch of a language pressed into service in order to give vent to a constantly more irritated dogmatism should obscure the fact that the magazine is trying to make a serious contribution to the understanding of the cinema (though, it must be said, very little to that of individual films)—even if their (curiously unhistorical) idea that the cinema is to be entirely remade, turned inside out and upside down, so as to shake off its bourgeois odium, is scarcely appealing in its grim puritanism to anyone who actually likes watching films.

In view of the fact that *Cinéthique* has with their current issue (No. 9/10) inaugurated what amounts to its third change of course (accompanied, this time, by an autocritique of sorts) the question poses itself if the magazine has given itself in its theoretical premisses enough margin to operate flexibly and yet coherently. With virtually no actual films to discuss, and its general critique of the cinema now mapped out, it seems to be heading fast towards its own vanishing point. Yet this possibility shows more clearly than one might have wished, that *Cinéthique* has always been struggling with an unresolved dilemma. On the one hand, it wants to flesh out Althusser's immensely complex model of the working of bourgeois society by elucidating one aspect of it: bourgeois ideology, subdivision cinema. On the other hand, there is a noticeable pull towards applying to the whole semiological-structuralist logomachia the razor of practical politics—with the cinema simply treated as a tactical weapon in the class-struggle, and enlisted unequivocally on the side of the proletariat. This latter tendency is especially evident in the articles of the editor, Gérard Leblanc, whose ideas on art and culture have the authentic ring of the Zdanovite.

If the two tendencies—the elucidatory neoMarxist and the moralizing 'proletarian'—are occasionally at odds, they find their common denominator in the overall strategy of developing a 'materialist' critique and practice of the cinema. What does this mean? Basically two things: a new way of making films, and a different attitude when looking at them. In order for the audience to become conscious of the materialist nature of the cinematic experience, and thus in order to understand the cinema 'correctly'—so the argument goes—it must learn (or be taught) to consider a film first and foremost (*Cinéthique* phase I: exclusively) as a 'product'—of labour (both intellectual and manual) and of dialectically operating economic and ideological forces (what kind of projects are being financed, what films fail to get distribution, and why). This a-priori is scarcely a self-sufficient critical statement (though some of the early articles gave rise to such a misunderstanding, especially where they seemed to insist that a film is only worth looking at if it includes shots of the technicians and a detailed rundown on financing and costs), but should perhaps more modestly be taken as the starting point for a critical-analytic model, focussing less on artistic 'consciousness' and more on artistic 'production'. The proposition indicates well enough the drift in *Cinéthique's* critical inquiry: to define some of the concepts considered relevant and necessary for building (the theory of?) a materialist cinema. These are basically drawn from the somewhat dated vocabulary of econo-

mism, though enriched with such Althusserian notions as that of 'rupture' (see in this respect the editorial "Direction" in No. 5). Any other concept of film-criticism, in particular the model which suggests that a film is the 'creation' of an 'auteur', who is giving 'expression' to a 'vision of the world' which is 'realized' through a 'personal style' is anathema to *Cinéthique*, because seen as the threadbare and bankrupt mystification of a film's real (i.e. economic) raison d'être. The chief enemy is the idealist heritage of cinema criticism and of culture in general (in fact we are witnessing a manichean struggle: "la guerre mortelle entre le matérialisme et l'idéalisme"—No. 5 p.20), which is identified with the rule of the bourgeoisie and the exploitation of the proletariat.

"How does the bourgeoisie abstract [a film] from its conditions of production and distribution? By classifying it in terms of leisure ("film for the family") or of culture ("art-film"). Films aren't made in order to invest capital at a high profit rate (and to reinvest these profits, obtained by the economic exploitation of technicians, directors, etc., in other films), but rather for some supposedly humanitarian aim: to move, to entertain, to promote culture. [. . .] How is this commodity sold? The methods differ according to the market. If the product is geared to the masses ("general release") one sticks on the label "star". If the film is aimed at an élite, the label is "auteur". Sometimes both labels are combined, as when a well-known director uses popular stars. Truffaut + Belmondo + Deneuve = "La Sirene du Mississippi" (No. 5 p.4/5). With an analysis as superficial as this, one fears the worst for the proposed remedy. What is to be done, according to *Cinéthique*? The proletarian film-maker will produce films which are unclassifiable, films which refuse either to entertain or to 'say' anything, but instead have as a primary aim to exacerbate, alienate and irritate the spectator. ("Le piège que la bourgeoisie tend au cinéma: masquer son travail en imposant un sens à ce qu'il montre"—No. 5 p.36). This refusal to make films with which the spectator might identify—on any level, emotional or intellectual—indicates the point of rupture, and the beginning of a materialist cinema. There is an article entitled "Godard—exchange value or value for use" (No. 5 p.22), in which UN FILM COMME LES AUTRES is explained as a *film de rupture* because it represents a deliberate effort on the part of its director to depreciate the 'market value' of his name among bourgeois intellectuals. On another occasion, Godard is praised for having, in ONE PLUS ONE, bungled certain sequences in order to prevent the producer from making any money on the film (No. 6 p.42). Whatever one may think about Godard's latest films, it seems obvious that their effect, their æsthetic principles are in no way adequately elucidated by a single reference to their economic or anti-economic motivation. Just as with Truffaut's SIRENE, *Cinéthique's* remarks, even if true, leave all the more worthwhile questions unanswered. The sad fact is that faced with a specific film, *Cinéthique* has nothing to say.

By contrast, the desire to analyse the cinema 'in general' as an integral part of an ideological nexus, i.e. as a system of practices—social, economic, artistic—which are inter-related and determining each other in varying degrees, is promising, if only because it proposes "a critique of the [linguistic] imprecisions which [the cinema's] ideological situation propagates" (No. 5 p15). As a meta-critique of bourgeois criticism (in line with what Gozlin did to Bazin's critical terminology) it might usefully interpret some of the notions and values which sustain 'popular' cinematic taste (or 'highbrow' for that matter). This of course, would be a perfectly orthodox (in France, at any rate) sociological study. However, *Cinéthique* wants to go further. It would claim, for instance, that the distorted picture given of power-politics in the James Bond films, or the stultifying use made of such relative and spuriously evaluative criteria as "entertainment", serving (together with its opposite "thought-provoking") as the normative grid of a certain type of journalistic criticism, is not simply a regrettable sign of creative or critical impotence, but part of a self-perpetuating system in which a certain class stands to gain by manipulating bogus value and constructing false antitheses.

There is some undeniable truth to this, and the relation between, on the one hand, what a person enjoys or likes, and his critical awareness of reality or his actual social or psychological needs on the other, is a moot point, but as liberals (and some Marxists) never tire to point out, assuming that bourgeois culture may be a form of enforced alienation, it seems equally perverse to claim that, say, a work of art should be definable by the sum of its economic and ideological antecedents, from which alone it is supposed to derive value and significance. An extreme example of this kind of reductionism can be found in an article on CITIZEN KANE (No. 6 p.27—again signed by Gérard Leblanc) which manages the amazing equation Welles + Randolph Hearst + RKO = CITIZEN KANE = Nazism = Bazin.

Central to the magazine's concerns is the question of how the cinema functions by displacing social and psychological conflicts, and thus prevents a *prise de conscience* on the part of the spectator. The editorial in No. 5 has some harsh words to say about petit-bourgeois, individualist films that take a subjective stance on social and political problems, and the American as well as the American-influenced underground is summarily dismissed for having become a successful part of the 'youth-cult' industry band-wagon. There is a strict embargo on nudity, drugs, violence, emotion, suspense, drama, hero—which makes the logic of *Cinéthique's* aversion to virtually the entire body of existing films at least consistent, if no more convincing. The argument is a familiar one: any form of 'action' is considered instrumental in perpetuating the social and moral order of the bourgeoisie by providing substitute gratifications for the frustrations accumulated in ordinary life, and thus reinforces social and individual alienation, without pointing a way towards living out one's desires or satisfying one's needs in reality.

"In fact, it is in the interest of the bourgeoisie that the spectator should find compensations in the cinema. These compensations can be of a sexual, political, sentimental or metaphysical nature (there is one needed for all the alienations engendered by capitalism). By a kind of tacit vote, the spectator delegates his own powers to the characters on the screen who transform the world in his place. The famous window which the bourgeois cinema opens onto the world always reduces itself to giving the spectator the illusion of living his imaginary life by projecting it into a reality which doesn't exist" (No. 5 p.3). Such a line of inquiry has severe limitations. The fact that 'the cinema' is globally condemned for being escapist leaves no room for differentiations of any kind. Films are either good or bad, according to whether they are deemed bourgeois or not—and one wonders why *Cinéthique* bothers with an elaborate theory if in the final count, the matter is that simple?

There is, somewhere in its pages, the grudging admission that such a thing as a good 'idealist' film is possible, but the examples are disappointingly conservative (only European 'art' directors, with the metaphysical Bresson and Dreyer heading the list) and nothing more specific is said about them. Granted that *Cinéthique's* arguments are true regarding all the films that are bad anyway (and who would want to deny that 90 per cent of the world's film-production today is a waste of time?), this position doesn't allow itself to tell us anything worth knowing about those films which are, from an æsthetic or historical point of view, important. In a sense, *Cinéthique's* a-priori political commitment (the 'proletarian' orthodox line) permits it to eschew one major difficulty of 'political' cinema by ignoring it: æsthetics just aren't admitted as a valid epistemological category. The magazine's sociological generalizations are based on an atrophied idea of the nature and potential of art, seen as something simply to be annexed to political science, as a branch of socio-pathology.

The result is that *Cinéthique's* perspective can seem only plausible because resting on a kind of double error that perhaps cancels itself out: on the one hand, it overestimates the cinema's real, but limited capacity for obscuring, through displacement, psychic or social conflicts (as opposed to structuring an experience of reality in such a way as to 'free' psychic energy—one of the possible functions of a film that possesses æsthetic qualities) and secondly, it grossly underestimates the potential of 'idealist' (i.e. narrative-dramatic) cinema to generate a differentiated emotional response, and to represent moral and intellectual complexity in a concrete social or political situation (without thereby prevaricating over metaphysical ambiguities). Even within the politically committed cinema: one thinks of Rosi's SALVATORE GIULIANO or Guerra's OZ FUZIS (to give just two examples)—films which communicate through a narrative-dramatic framework of great subtlety the circumstances and growth of a political consciousness. *Cinéthique's* schematic approach to the question of 'escapism' precludes it from analyzing coherently the kinds of empathy or distancing effects that can be found in such films. The important question is to ask what the precise ends are to which these effects and techniques are being used. (In order to 'alienate' an audience, Brecht once said, you must never forget first to create the fiction to alienate it from). Instead, Gérard Leblanc lays down the law: "Disons-le avec force: tous les films qui font vivre au spectateur des émotions etrangères au cinéma sont bourgeois" (No. 5 p36).

The way some of the contributors to *Cinéthique* are trying to avoid the more obvious pitfalls of Leblanc's rigorism (what are, one is prompted to ask, properly cinematic emotions?), is to operate a kind of two-tier analysis of ideological elements in a film. There is, for instance, a tentative effort (and in the context of *Cinéthique's* general line almost subversive) in an article by Jean-Paul Fargier, one of the more lucid minds on the magazine, to establish æsthetics as a category distinct from ideology. Fargier quotes approvingly (he has since recanted—see No. 9/10) from a piece by Alain Badiou entitled 'autonomy of the æsthetic process'. The passage runs as follows: "Art isn't ideology. It is altogether impossible to explain it by a homological rapport with historical reality. The aesthetic process refocusses the mirror-relation in which ideology perpetuates its closed infinity. The æsthetic effect is indeed imaginary; but this imaginary [world] isn't the reflection of reality, but the reality of this reflection. Neither is art scientific. The æsthetic effect is not a cognitive effect. However, in so far as art is the realization and the differentiating denunciation of its own ideology, it is structurally closer to science than to ideology. It produces the imaginary reality of that which science appropriates as the real reality" (No. 6 p.50).

This somewhat inelegant passage states in Marxist terminology (the model is Goldmann's 'genetic structuralism') what has been a central theme of European æsthetic thought since the Romantics: that there is a cognitive dimension to art—a discovery which broke with the Aristotelian notion of art as mimesis. Symbolism, surrealism, Bachelard's phenomenological psychology (i.e. some of the most formative influences on modern French criticism) are unthinkable without this premiss of the autonomy of the æsthetic phenomenon. For any æsthetics of the cinema, this of course creates some obvious difficulties, since the cinema is nothing if not mimetic. It automatically suggests a homological relationship with the reality it depicts. *Cinéthique* is caught in this dilemma: it seems to want to base its anti-naturalistic theory of revolutionary cinema on the anti-mimetic, anti-Aristotelian current in modern æsthetic thought, but on the other hand, for political-ideological reasons, the major justification of this thought, namely æsthetic autonomy, is unacceptable.

What Fargier therefore does in his article, called "Parenthesis and Detour—essay in the theoretical definition of the rapport between cinema and politics", is to make a distinction between what he sees to be the cinema's twofold relation

to ideology: It *reproduces,* on a primary level, already existing ideologies (propagated in subject and story, stereotyped characters and dramatic situations, milieu, genre, etc.), which a 'left-wing' filmmaker can avoid. But it also *produces* its own specific ideology. Thus, even a film with a critical intention or a left-wing subject offers little resistance against being absorbed by the bourgeoisie into its own system of values, and therefore being transformed into a commodity destined for consumption (what *Cinéthique* calls the *cinéma-spectacle* syndrome), so long as it stays within the dramatic-narrative sequential framework taken over from naturalist drama and realist novels. (Pontecorvo's BATTLE OF ALGIERS suggests itself as an obvious candidate).

In order to prove this, *Cinéthique* has published an article (further ones were promised) which bases itself on the work of semiologists at the Ecole Pratique (Metz, Todorov, Bremond) who have analyzed the rhetoric of narrative genres, by isolating recurrent units which organize a narrative structure. The article in question is called "the figures of conditioning" (No. 5 p.41), and it deals with the rhetorical elements used in the cinema to construct dramatic situations in such a way as to persuade an audience that these conflicts are 'true to life'. But whereas the semiologists have contented themselves with showing that disjunction, pleonasm, inversion, tautology, etc. are pervasive figures which in various disguises or modifications structure the 'codes' of most artistic and communication media, reflecting thus a fairly homogeneous mode by which Western thinking apprehends and seeks to reproduce reality, *Cinéthique* seems to want to argue not only that this is typically bourgeois, but also that it has a specific relevance to the cinema, because the latter utilizes a directly naturalist non-symbolic language. Fargier's contention, therefore, is that there is a second-level ideological slant, embodied in the syntactical and optical mechanisms specific to the cinema, which are 'naturally' favourable to conveying a bourgeois picture of the world.

The burden of the argument rests on the assumption that the cinema is idealist and thus mystificatory precisely because of its treacherous mimesis, its ability to produce an impression of reality. (The force of the argument is considerably blunted, however, by Fargier's occasional use of the terms 'ideological' and 'bourgeois' as interchangeable. He has to admit that the idealist cinema practiced in socialist countries is favourable to a proletarian ideology, and therefore of 'tactical' value. Does this mean that only a decadent bourgeois society needs a materialist cinema?)

From this impression of reality (which most critics would regard as the cinema's chief asset and primary claim to æsthetic consideration) Fargier wants to tie the rope with which to hang it: since a film endeavours to persuade us that what is shown is part of a seamless, self-contained totality, it makes us victims of an optical illusion by disguising the procedures, the labour, the multiple techniques and resources that have gone into producing this effect of totality, thus pretending to give us reality directly, and not just a concoction of sound and images ("même le film le plus révolutionnaire ne peut donner que ce qu'il a: des images et des sons"—No. 5 p.36). At the same time, it makes us victims of an ideology, because what characterizes an ideology is precisely that it is a body of ideas, beliefs, conventions, verbal and visual icons which are instantly recognized and accepted by a certain society or social class as true and self-evident.

Now, the inference which Fargier draws is that the 'truth' of the cinema, its illusion of reality, which on the technical level is so manifestly 'constructed' and manipulated in view of certain ends (be they 'naïvely' in order to engage the spectator emotionally in the fate of the characters, and to allow him to follow the development of a story visually, or 'politically' as propaganda, and deliberate falsification) is analogous to the processes which condition us in social life to accept certain states of affairs, and especially the economic rapport between social classes as natural, immutable, etc. In other words, both cinema and bourgeois ideology militate actively for the *status quo.* The mechanism (natural or culturally induced) which governs our 'decoding' of filmic language into comprehensible information and allows us to recognize and subsequently identify with an image on the screen (or series of images), because felt as 'true', is the same that operates in ordinary life and prevents an understanding of the actual contradictions in society by presenting at all levels a spurious coherence. Cinematic logic and bourgeois logic share the same unilinear goal-orientated 'discourse', disguising the dialectical nature of social reality instead of revealing it.

Furthermore, *Cinéthique* argues (echoing the Cubists, Max Ernst and the surrealists when they championed non-representative art), that the optical construction of the camera gives a 'monocular' view of the world, that is, it assumes automatically the position of the single point of view, exclusive, voyeuristic, and inherited from perspectival painting of the Renaissance. Metz, in an interview (No. 6 p.22) points out that the argument about the camera's 'optical castration' is in fact yet another form of the Bazin-Eisenstein controversy about the relative merits of *plan-sequence* and out-and-out montage. From the position of *Cinéthique,* what is wrong with the *plan-sequence* is its 'naturalist' perspective that suggests an objective order within which events take place, and thus stabilizes the spectator's perception to a point where he assumes comfortably and unquestionably a position of contemplation or vicarious empathy. He will be able to recognize himself on the screen and thus, by *Cinéthique's* reasoning, **not** recognize himself in actual life. By contrast, a non-illusionist 'materialist' film because not fabricating a coherent fiction, would transform the æsthetic experience of watching a film into a participatory act, in which "there is work on the part of the spectator—decipherment, and a reading of the traces produced by the work of the film [on its material]" (No. 5 p21).

Cinéthique thus argues for a wholly self-conscious cinema, concerned only with itself and the fact of its own existence as a form of visual reproduction — a meta-cinema, in other words, consisting of filmic essays answering to the question "what is the cinema?" "what is a film?" Since a film in bourgeois society cannot say anything about the world without falling victim to one or the other form of 'idealist' ideology, its only valid role in social reality is on the level of 'theoretical practice', a niche which *Cinéthique* has yet to fill with a precise meaning. This general position, of course, parallels in some ways that of a certain avant-garde literature—Joyce, Becket, nouveau roman—where the object of literature is not 'the world', but language itself, in what hides or reveals itself through its structure and articulation.

What distinguishes *Cinéthique* (and *Tel Quel*) from this current of modernist aestheticism is the insistence on the Marxist-revolutionary (in *Cinéthique's* case proletarian-Marxist) pretentions of their efforts, for whose justifications no intellectual argument is too convoluted. *Cinéthique's* main contribution is that it has drawn attention to the fact that there are several ideologically interpretable dimensions to a film: its subject matter, its syntactical construction, its status as product of an industry. The attempts to relate and analytically describe these various dimensions within one critical theory and to derive from this theory a practical model of how to make films is as ambitious as it seems basically unsuccessful and unconvincing—if not altogether misconceived.

For the reproaches which are levelled against the narrative cinema —namely that it is idealist by disguising its own cinematic nature, by 'naïvely' giving the reflection of a (possibly false) reality, instead of giving the filmic reality of a political reflection, and by propagating a monocular, and hence individualist-subjective point of view—are simply not borne out by the evidence. They are based on an error of judgement which on the theoretical level is due to an inability to discuss the properly æsthetic component of a film, and practically the result of a total ignorance of the cinema's history. No film of Lang, Renoir, Murnau, Hitchcock, Bunuel, Godard, or Rivette (to mention only a few) masks its own genesis or passes itself off as the direct, unreflected reproduction of reality. Renoir's LA NUIT DU CARREFOUR, made in 1932, is more modern in this respect than many a *film de rupture* produced today: it is precisely what *Cinéthique* demands of a film: it plays with its own fiction troubling in more than one way the mirror image which bourgeois ideology is supposed to give of bourgeois social reality. And yet, Renoir's film is naturalist, dramatic and linear, with its various levels of 'discourse' perfectly articulated by a complex modulation of mood, emphasis and visual rhythm.

The value of a critical system must be judged by the amount of work it can do: that is, by its ability to evaluate and differentiate consistently within a given framework. *Cinéthique's* wholesale condemnation of the narrative cinema is in one respect its strong point—it permits it to live in some cinematic utopia, having staked its claims in an area where only the advent of Revolution itself could seriously challenge it. As a critical method for examining existing films, its analystic tools are virtually useless. So long as it cannot accommodate more positively the æsthetic qualities of a film (and that means a close evaluation of the given historical context), it is not practising film-criticism, but some form of semiological luddditism, which proves in the last instance little that is decisive about the actual ideological significance or the future potential of the narrative 'illusionist' cinema. There is between attempting to understand the 'code' which constitutes the narrative form on its most generalized level, and the demand that this code be altered, a gap which cannot be bridged by a theoretical argument of the type proposed.

The economic and political ills affecting the modern film-industry are too obvious to merit an elaborate theory. They cannot be cured by 'anti-films' practising minimalist protests, ideological rupture, or by deliberately bungled takes. If a battle is to be fought with the way the industry is presently organized (one of *Cinéthique's* original aims) *Cinéthique* has moved further and further away from the front-lines. If it is, however, a question of alternative critical models, emphasizing the various 'significant' axes that run from the product to the society which surrounds it (and of which the director's intention or vision may only be one), then *Cinéthique's* revolutionary - prescriptive pretensions do not stand it in good stead. "Art", Trotsky has pointed out, "is far less capable than science of anticipating the future. Such prescriptions as 'pave the road to socialism' give little more to the creative imagination than the price-list of a hardware shop or a railway timetable". *Cinéthique* is doing prodigious work on this timetable. But with its wilful ignorance about the creative imagination, it may well be that it has boarded a train without an engine. And one wonders just how much theoretical practice is needed to put such a train in motion.

Thomas Elsaesser

Cinéthique *is available from 2 rue Théophraste Renandot Paris 15e.*

OS FUZIS

BOOK REVIEWS

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

José Luis Guarner, Studio Vista, London, 1970, 70p.

Britain has treated Roberto Rossellini with the characteristically philistine combination of neglect and mindless theft which appears to be its hallmark in the contemporary epoch, at least as far as the cinema is concerned. I therefore welcome Guarner's book, while at the same time insisting on a hard criticism of it.

The welcome and the critique are needed simultaneously, for exactly the same reasons. In the first place, the particular combination of neglect and theft which has been Rossellini's fate in Britain necessitates a rather careful situating of any work on him. His large cinematic œuvre is only spasmodically available. Nothing can substitute for a rigorous viewing of Rossellini's films. I think it must be assumed (explicitly) that virtually no one in Britain has seen Rossellini's early films, made while the Fascist régime was still in power: from innumerable interviews and articles referring to ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA as "Rossellini's first films", this would seem an unavoidable assumption. But not only have most people in Britain not seen Rossellini's first, fascist films, they do not even know they exist. Rossellini's career, and indeed the whole concept of 'neo-realism' are, in effect, unknown in England.

An ignorance of the founding moment of a director's career in the cinema can only lead to some kind of aberrant perspective; Guarner's book makes no more than a gesture in this direction since he devotes a mere half-dozen pages to Rossellini's fascist films. There is no attempt to go into the historical origins of 'neo-realism' or, equally important, to try to analyse the transition from Rossellini's fascist films to his post-fascist films. Since 'neo-realism' is, at least in popular mythology, thought to be by definition a left-wing mode of film-making, these two lacunæ must be criticized, since they undermine what I take to be Guarner's project—a book on the films of Rossellini.

Recently, a considerable amount of work has been done abroad (mainly in Italy) on the origins of 'neo-realism' and the findings of this research should soon be made available in England. The main point to be made at once is that all existing attempts to establish some kind of decisive break at 1943 (the fall of Mussolini) are more or less unscientific and usually voluntarist and/or apologetic. What did change in 1943 (in Central and Southern Italy) was the purely political régime, but claims for a completely 'new' Italian cinema, miraculously emerging out of nowhere, must be rejected.

A full development of this necessary task would involve two components: detailed work on Italian cinema culture prior to 1943 and rigorous qualification of the alleged novelty of post-1943 work.

It is well known that Italy had a much richer fascist culture than Germany: several world-famous figures like D'Annunzio, Marinetti and Pirandello supported fascism in their individual ways, and one of Italy's leading philosophers, Giovanni Gentile, lent his prestige to covering the régime on the front of ideas. Italy was also able to offer a much freer cultural atmosphere than Nazi Germany, and after Hitler's advent to power two of Germany's most notable film personalities emigrated to Italy: Walter Ruttmann and Max Ophüls (the latter via the Soviet Union, where he made a brief and unsuccessful halt). A year later Ophüls had produced perhaps his greatest work, LA SIGNORA DI TUTTI, in Italy. Ruttmann, surprisingly for a former prominent member of the German left, went to work with Pirandello on a film entitled ACCIAIO (*Steel*, 1933), much derived from Verga, particularly the CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA. Italian critics who have seen ACCIAIO have indicated it as a fundamental date in Italian cinema history, and in the history of 'neo-realism'. The combination of talent in itself deserves attention: on the one hand Pirandello, on the other hand, Ruttmann, the director of BERLIN, DIE SYMPHONIE EINER GROSSSTADT, soon to return to Nazi Germany and direct a number of documentaries on steel production for the big armaments companies and, finally, war documentaries. Apart from anything else, it would be interesting to compare Rossellini's L'ETA DEL FERRO with ACCIAIO and Ruttman's German steel films.

Italian fascism also left a good deal more room for manœuvre to younger writers and thinkers than did German fascism, and this latitude was particularly marked in the cinema. It happened that one of Mussolini's sons was particularly keen on the movies, and took an active part not only as producer but also in editing and covering the film review, *Cinema*. *Cinema* became the focus of activity for a whole group of young cinephiles, most of whom only became well known after the fall of Mussolini. Apart from Vittorio Mussolini, the Duce's son, the group included Roberto Rossellini, Luigi Chiarini, Carlo Lizzani, Gianni Puccini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Umberto Barbaro. The connections at the time were

rather closer than may now be remembered: for example, Gentile wrote the introduction to Chiarini's book, *Cinematografo* in 1935; Vittorio Mussolini was the producer of Rossellini's UN PILOTA RITORNA (1942), on which Antonioni shared the script credit. The destinies of the members of the group were remarkable: Rossellini and Antonioni becoming major directors, Lizzani and Puccini minor ones; Chiarini theoretician and organizer of the Venice Film Festival; and Barbaro, already an established theoretician and thinker at the time of *Cinema*, surviving to become one of the two leading Marxist theoreticians of film in Italy (and perhaps the world), along with Galvano della Volpe.

The term 'neo-realism' appears to have been coined by Barbaro himself, but—so far as I know—has never received a precise definition or area of application. It is notable (something not dealt with by Guarner) that Rossellini rejects the usual facile method of using the term to cover post-ROMA, CITTA APERTA work, and **explicitly** dates the movement covered by the term 'neo-realism' (which he **implicitly** rejects) back several years, at least to films of the vintage of LA NAVE BIANCA (1941). Moreover, he also refuses to accept the idea that there is any cæsura in his own work: "From my documentaries, to my first war films, my post-war films and on up to my pictures of today, there is only one, single line, although, of course, I have been seeking out different things at different times. No one could deny, for example, that there is one and the same spirituality (*spiritualità*) in NAVE BIANCA and in UOMO DELLA CROCE, in PAISA and in FRANCESCO, GIULLARE DI DIO, in the short episode, IL MIRACOLO and in the end of STROMBOLI". The very first characteristic of his own films, what he calls *coralità* (chorality), Rossellini sees as a continuing feature. "The realist (*realistico*) film is, in itself, choral. The sailors in NAVE BIANCA count just as much as the people sheltering in the hut at the end of UOMO DELLA CROCE, just as much as the population in ROME, OPEN CITY, just as much as the partisans in PAISA and the friars in FRANCESCO".[1]

Rossellini, of course, is absolutely correct: there is no break between his fascist films and his post-fascist films. The difference between ROMA, CITTA APERTA and, say, L'UOMO DELLA CROCE is one of content (and, to a lesser extent, of cast)—there is no 'stylistic' break whatsoever; furthermore, there is no radical modification of the basic feature, which directors as different as Rossellini and Pasolini have identified as the No. 1 aspect, "the way of looking at the world". Rossellini looks with equal favour on the Catholic priest working as chaplain to a fascist army invading the Soviet Union (and attempting to convert the local inhabitants to a profoundly reactionary viewpoint) and on a Catholic priest helping the Resistance in Italy against the Nazis (L'UOMO DELLA CROCE and ROMA, CITTA APERTA). This, I must add, is not the same gift as being able to see, and present, both sides of a problem.

I think the ignorance of the pre-ROMA, CITTA APERTA period of Rossellini's work has had a number of grave effects, tantamount to those which a biographer might encounter trying to write an analytic history of someone's life with no knowledge of events before the person in question had reached the age of 15. A re-reading now of the articles in *Sequence* devoted to the films of Rossellini and the 'neo-realists' reveals clearly the **impossibility** of the critical position adopted at the time (a melange of insights, genuine appreciation and aberrant ignorance and omission). This defective 'reading' of Rossellini, based on defective viewing then subsequently translated itself into further aberrant criticism (the successive rejection of several of Rossellini's greatest works), which in turn contributed to a refusal even to screen many of Rossellini's films. But Rossellini, more than any other director I can think of, needs to have his work viewed as a whole, and in chronological order, and this absence of his films has made it simply impossible to assess his work, creating a vicious circle of rejection-absence-ignorance-incomprehension-rejection-absence . . . It has, of course, also led to an uncritical integration of what some British directors presumably thought to be the essential ingredients of 'neo-realism'. The inanity of those who thought that a worthless ham like Fellini had anything in common with a master like Rossellini, or who were stupid enough to commit themselves in writing to the ludicrously untenable position that De Sica was a better director than Rossellini, has since become part of the burdensome heritage of British cinema from John Schlesinger through Karel Reisz to Lindsay Anderson *et al.*

As the most perceptive of the *Sequence* group, Lindsay Anderson seems to have been the first to wake up to the fact that he had stumbled across rather more than he could digest: by the winter of 1947 he was already expressing his doubts about PAISA (in a highly confused manner).[2] Six issues later *Sequence* was publishing an incredibly violent and subjective attack on GERMANIA, ANNO ZERO towards the "facile improvisation and sketchiness" of which Lotte Eisner was deciding, with all the blindness of hindsight, that PAISA was the first step down the slippery slope.[3] After printing an even more absurd attack on GERMANIA in issue 10, *Sequence* signed off on 'neo-realism' with a brief uncomprehending note on THE MIRACLE by Anderson in Number 11.[4]

In effect, Rossellini was treated by *Sequence* as a fad, rather than as a force. Knowing apparently nothing of his origins, they were able to write him off in a completely a-historical way, elevating prejudice to the level of a critical criterion. Rossellini, like many intelligent and inventive directors, has certainly made a number of 'turns' in his career, but each time a 'turning-point' has caused admirers to reject him (as, for example, after GERMANIA, VOYAGE TO ITALY or IL GENERALE DELLA ROVERE) he has come up with another extremely new masterpiece: FRANCESCO, GIULLARE DI DIO, VIVA L'ITALIA! and LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV are certainly among his greatest works (and, en passant, far superior to ROMA, CITTA APERTA).

In Italy, Rossellini has had rather a different critical career. Interestingly, he was ignored at first in the immediate post-war period by the then cultural vanguard of the Marxist left, *Il politecnico*, edited by Vittorini. ROMA, CITTA APERTA was not reviewed in *Il politecnico* at the time of its appearance.[5] Rossellini, in spite of ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA, was seen as a politically ambiguous director. He was alleged

to support the Christian Democrat Party, the ruling organization in Italy, highly clerical and anti-Communist and bent on burying the revolutionary impetus that had emerged during the Resistance.

But Rossellini was already light-years ahead of his critics, as was later to be recognized by, among others, Jean-Luc Godard, whose phrase Guarner prints in his Postscript: "Where others will only be arriving in maybe twenty years, he has already been".

From Italy, Rossellini moved to Germany. Rossellini has repeatedly mentioned his abiding interest, and concern with Germany. Like Visconti (SENSO[6], VAGHE STELLE DELL'ORSA, THE DAMNED, DEATH IN VENICE), Rossellini is intrigued with Germany, and with Germany's relationship with Italy, which figures in a succession of films: ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA (the German occupation of Italy, and the Italians' attempts to liberate themselves), GERMANIA, ANNO ZERO (the 'new' Germany: is it really new?), STROMBOLI (the aftermath of the German devastation of Europe), LA PAURA, ERA NOTTE A ROMA (the German occupation of Italy, again) and ANIMA NERA (whose 'hero' bears the scars of a homosexual experience with a Nazi officer during the occupation). Far from seeming "improvised and sketchy" as Lotte Eisner would have it, GERMANIA now, over twenty years later, still stands as probably the best film on post-war Germany ever made. One of the reasons for this is Rossellini's ability to be prepared to try and seize history at its most unlikely moments: few directors thought Germany was even interesting at the time, from the inside.

It would have been good to see a more extended attempt to assess Rossellini's attitude to history. Guarner makes a few rather elliptic allusions (for example, in discussing ERA NOTTE A ROMA), but he does not come to grips with Rossellini's complex and profoundly successful cinematic approach to history—best exemplified in VIVA L'ITALIA! and LOUIS XIV. There seem to be some theses there, particularly on VIVA L'ITALIA! and VANINA VANINI, but they do not emerge very clearly—and they are vitiated by an unworthy comparison with Visconti's SENSO, which is slandered in a quite unjustifiable way.

For those who wish to make use of Guarner's book for studying Rossellini, I would like to make a few more detailed criticisms. Guarner describes Rossellini's three fascist films (LA NAVE BIANCA, UN PILOTA RITORNA and L'UOMO DELLA CROCE) as "the least consistent and most debatable part of Rossellini's work" (p.11): this is in no way argued, and seems to me quite gratuitous. On the contrary, these works seem to be quite consistent with Rossellini's later work (by his own account as well as by mine. Discussing ROMA, CITTA APERTA a few pages later (p.13), Guarner calls it "the most melodramatic of neo-realist films": absolutely correct. So-called 'neo-realism' was incredibly melodramatic, in the conventional sense of the term. So were the fascist films: of LA NAVE BIANCA, Guarner writes: "The natural quality is sacrificed to rhetoric . . . and everything is bathed in slushy music. This sentimentality nullifies the simple and direct aspects of the next scene . . ." (p.8). But rhetoric and sentimentality are two of the key elements of 'neo-realism', and they do need discussing, and the connections examined. (Parenthetically, I think the claim that the music for LA NAVE BIANCA is "inconsistent" needs arguing, as it is by Renzo Rossellini, and presumably had Roberto Rossellini's approval).

I would also query Guarner's analytic categories at some points: for example, discussing LA LOTTA DELL' UOMO PER LA SUA SOPRAVVIVENZA (p.118), he writes: "As in the banquet scene in LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV, the importance of the camera-movement is not æsthetic, but moral: it seeks to apprise us of a political fact". "Moral" (whatever it may mean) can have nothing to do with "political". To apprise viewers of a political fact is not "moral" in any sense I could ascribe to the word, and as a critical statement seems to me to undermine Rossellini's **highly political** approach to picture-making.

This confusion between morals and politics runs through much of the book. Early on (p.10), Guarner writes that both UN PILOTA RITORNA and L'UOMO DELLA CROCE "are built on the common theme of liberty, which later becomes one of the fundamental themes of Rossellini's work". But how can L'UOMO DELLA CROCE be "built on the theme of liberty?"

It would also have been good to have seen several points expanded (although I appreciate the space limitations): among these would be the relationship between Vidor and Rossellini (p.6), given that Rossellini acknowledges that seeing early Vidors like THE CROWD and HALLELLUJAH! was important in stimulating him to go into films (and there are obvious parallels between the works of the two directors); the relationship between Rossellini and De Robertis (pp.6-7) and the whole set-up at the time including the role of Vittorio Mussolini (p.10); Rossellini's vision of the importance of actors like Magnani and Fabrizi in the earlier post-1943 films; what happened, in more detail, to the sizeable number of films which Rossellini did not manage to complete as he wished, for various reasons: DESIDERIO (p.13), LA MACCHINA AMMAZZACATTIVI (p.38), DOV'E LA LIBERTA? (pp.56-7), ANGST/LA PAURA (p.73), VANINA VANINI (p.100); Rossellini's relationship with the Italian left-wing intelligentsia—and particularly with the Italian Communist Party, given that one of its prominent intellectuals, Antonello Trombardori co-authored the original (rejected) treatment on VANINA VANINI, and that Galvano Della Volpe, the leader of the anti-romantic, anti-idealist wing of contemporary Italian Marxism sat on the board of *Filmcritica* alongside Rossellini (if, say, *mutatis mutandis*, Lindsay Anderson and A. J. Ayer sat on a film magazine together, this is something that should be taken into account). Lastly, Italian phrases should be translated: this goes both for film titles, like LA MACCHINA AMMAZZACATTIVI (THE CAMERA THAT KILLS BAD PEOPLE)[7], and for phrases in the text like the slogan 'Chi si ferma è perduto' ('Anyone who stops is lost') or the long end-title on L'UOMO DELLA CROCE (p.10).[8]

Guarner's book has some good sections, such as that on the little-appreciated and even less seen ILLIBATEZZA (pp.103-5), the Rossellini contribution to ROGOPAG. I very much hope that the appearance of a book on Rossellini in English will both stimulate a

reviewing of his work, if possible *in toto*; but because of Rossellini's towering importance in the history of the cinema, and his innumerable contributions both seen and unseen, both the book and his films must be 'read' with a critical, attentive and informed mind. Those who love Rossellini's work must face up to his sentimentalism; those who admit his political audacity must face up to his populism; and the many who have taken from Rossellini without understanding what he was all about and unloaded his great discoveries into the kitchen sink must be attacked.

JON HALLIDAY

NOTES

1. 'Colloquio sul neorealismo' (interview with Rossellini by Mario Verdone, *Bianco e Nero*, February 1952. The original of the phrase between asterisks is "pur attraverso le differenti ricerche", which could also be translated as something like "although, of course, I was trying to do different things at different times" (or it could, less probably, refer to technique).

2. *Sequence* 2 (Winter 1947). PAISA was first shown in Britain at the Edinburgh Festival of Documentary. One may notice that the English translation of the title at the time was "Ordinary People"!

3. Lotte H. Eisner, 'Notes on Some Recent Italian Films', *Sequence* (Summer 1949): 52-58. "We must, I think, revise a number of opinions that have been formed rather prematurely about the Italian cinema: too much importance has been attached to Rossellini, too little acknowledgment has been given to Vergano and de Sica" (p.52). "In relating de Sica to the new Italian realism, one feels that his method is more complex than Rossellini's, more controlled, disciplined by a feeling for structure and plastic values that is still developing". If "one" feels this, one can "feel" anything.

4. L.G.A. on THE MIRACLE, *Sequence* 11 (Summer 1950).

5. See Alberto Pozzolini, 'Il neorealismo e "Il Politecnico" di Vittorini', *Filmcritica* No. 132: 187-191.

6. SENSO, of course, involves Austria-Hungary rather than Germany.

7. 'Macchina' can mean any kind of 'thing' or machine.

8. There are a few points where the translation seems questionable, e.g., "tendentious" as used on p.100 seems odd ("tendentious", which is never neutral in English, is quite neutral in certain European languages). There are also the usual, apparently inevitable irritating inconsistencies: in the text (p.6) PRELUDE A L'APRES-MIDI D'UN FAUNE is presented as being, apparently, Rossellini's first short; in the filmography (p.137) it appears after DAPHNE; the length of ERA NOTTE A ROMA, which is twice given as 145 minutes in the text (p.87, p.116) appears in the filmography (p.140) as 120 minutes, without explanation; similarly the running times of both VIVA L'ITALIA! and VANINA VANINI differ in the text (p.116) and in the filmography (p.140), although it is stated that the latter was butchered around.

THE NOTEBOOKS OF CAPTAIN GEORGES

Jean Renoir, Fontana Library, 1966.

RENOIR, MY FATHER

Jean Renoir, Fontana Library, 1962.

There is no question but that Jean Renoir's major creative achievement is in the cinema; his films are important not only for their expressive qualities but for their status in the history and development of the cinema. Renoir's books have no such exemplary position but the two that have been translated into English have claims on our attention beyond those implied by their author being the director of LA REGLE DU JEU and LE CAROSSE D'OR.

The evident pleasure which attends Renoir's creative work and which finds expression in the films has, I'm sure, given Renoir much of the popularity he's enjoyed. For him at least there is no problem of affirmation, life is to be experienced, contemplated and revealed: "Notre fonction c'est, avant tout, de regarder le monde de regarder le monde et puis de le raconter . . . et cette fonction porte un nom . . . la démystification", for him: "tout comprehendre, c'est tout pardonner". At the centre of his writing is the same pleasure in the apprehension of an unfragmented, vital and active experience that's offered in the movies.

Renoir's indebtedness to his father has received ample acknowledgement and is quite unmistakable. His description of Auguste Renoir: "The idea that the intellect is superior to the senses was not an article of faith with him" might as well be of himself and just as the activities celebrated in the work of Renoir père, are those of the senses, so the locus of virtuous action and happiness in Renoir's fiction (literary and cinematic) is often sensual and instinctual. The positive and creative forces in *The Notebooks of Captain Georges*, principally Agnes and Georges act instinctually, indeed Agnes is able to redeem Georges from his prison of the world of the "poule de luxe" and the bourgeois experience through her capacity for direct sensual generosity: "Exquisite grace of supple body under flowing garments, bare feet in the dried mud; grace of the hand maidens of King Oedipus . . . I long to touch the brown pure breasts glowing with the softness of a summer night. But I would need to be a poet to evoke the image of Agnes and I am nothing but a member of the upper class whom for a time she caused to forget his bourgeois state. I depict myself and my environment the better to understand our story".

It's an act of great intelligence in the author to deploy the slightly tired imagery of "summer nights" etc. as a sign of the unredeemed nature of the speaker; in this context "bourgeois state" takes on the resonance of "fallen state".

The strength of Renoir fils over Renoir père can be located in the last sentence: "the celebratory attitude of the artist to experience is married in Jean Renoir's best work to the activity of an analytical, critical and ordering intelligence; in contrast the cognitive elements of experience seem almost completely absent from the work of Auguste Renoir". But both men's work shares in an inheritance of the dominant strain of C19th art: realism. We're now past the idiot contemporary responses to the 1874 Impressionist exhibition and can clearly see how much Auguste Renoir participated in and continued the development of painting towards the location of a convincing representation of the visual world. E. H.

Gombrich speaks of Renoir's picture "A dance at the Moulin de la Galette" as a great realistic picture, though of course it and other work of the Impressionist group was not understood as such in the C19th: "The apparent sketchiness has nothing to do with carelessne is but is the outcome of great artistic wisdom. If Renoir had painted in every detail the picture would look dull and lifeless. It was their discovery that the dark shadows of the kind Leonardo used for modelling do not occur in sunlight and open air which barred the traditional way out to the impressionists".

The achievement of the Impressionists was then, though a triumph of originality, part of a tradition: "The great artists of [earlier] periods had made one discovery after another which allowed them to conjure up a convincing picture of the visible world but none of them had seriously challenged the conviction that each object in nature had its definite fixed form and colour. It may be said therefore that Manet and his followers brought about a revolution in the rendering of colours which is almost comparable with the revolution in the representation of forms brought about by the Greeks".

Jean Renoir's films owe much pictorially to C19th painting, their picnics, open-air scenes, dappled light are reminiscent of the Impressionists, as Cocteau said: "Les films noirs sont aussi en couleurs".

It's very striking looking through Renoir's credits to see how many films were constructed on armatures offered by French literature—Beaumarchais, Feydeau, Flaubert, Mirbeau, Merimée, Maupassant and Zola.

The classical models to which many works are directly indebted and in whose characteristic forms most are cast make for the lucidity and comprehensibility of Renoir's work. The relationship of audience and artist is that established by the novelists and is never called into question, expectations about consistent and logical development of narrative are invariably satisfied, and the integrity of the photographic image remains unviolated. Renoir is not an experimental or intellectual artist—his forms are those of his patrimony and are accepted by audience and artist alike.

The Notebooks of Captain Georges follows the structure of one of the most popular and pervasive C19th fictional forms; that of the "conte". In fact it is very like Maupassant, the "conte" dealing, characteristically, with class relationships in the demi-monde (as Georges says it's only in the army or brothel that bourgeoisie and working-classes may meet uninsulated by their separate exclusive exoticisms), the central and distinguishing distinction between Renoir and Maupassant is one of tone and therefore of attitude towards experience. Renoir is Maupassant stripped of frenzy or hate. For Maupassant the brothel is a theatre in which the futility of human contacts and the emptiness of life is defined in a relationship of trade; for Renoir it's a place in which individuals may meet and define themselves undetermined by wealth, role or social position. It's of course in the brothel that George meets Agnes and establishes the central creative experience of both their lives; the brothel is in *Notebooks* a centre of life, freedom and respect for others, its antinomy the bourgeois institution of marriages through which Emilien is able to enslave Agnes.

The Zouave captain at Amiens agrees with Georges that girls from brothels make the best wives, his criteria of female excellence like those of Renoir père: submission to men, unpretentiousness and the capacity to make daily living, household tasks, cooking, child rearing, creative and satisfying experiences. And the relationship of Agnes and Georges is in some ways like that of Auguste Renoir with his wife and models (though it would seem from the hints given in *Renoir my Father* of somewhat greater intensity), certainly Renoir's studio has some of the qualities of Agnes' brothel—the relationship between employer and employee, client and whore, artist and model one of equality, and sanctified by what Renoir père described as the "state of grace which comes from contemplating God's most beautiful creation: the human body". We may note that Jean Renoir chose this as a locus for his life, both in his creative work and directly in his marriage to one of his father's models.

The books seem very personal, almost private, the conversational manner, the intimacy of the experiences described in each and the intensity, particularly of the *Notebooks* dispose the reader to consider the narrator as coterminous with the author, the recurrence of events in historical and fictional narratives confirm the reader's estimate. We learn that Auguste Renoir had in early life an experience very like that of M. Lange, of working in an "art factory" (producing images of Marie Antoinette rather than Arizona Jim), and establishing it as a co-operative, that the names of bassethounds connected with Auguste Renoir recur as the names of Richard Hartley's corgis, that the name of the major-domo in LA REGLE DU JEU and *The Notebooks of Captain Georges* is the same. Jean Renoir states his view, different in some ways from his father's, that the true subject of an artist's work is his own personality; indeed his epigraph to *Renoir my Father*: "It is not Renoir that you are presenting to us, but your own conception of him".

"Of course. History is essentially subjective after all", alerts us to the status of that book as a documentation of his own view of his father. There is for example very little for those interested in Auguste's work or in the man except as apprehended by the son.

We may fairly describe the characteristics of the two books, in view of the author's initial invocation and the internal evidence of tone correspondences, etc. as those of the author, the lives celebrated in them, if only in an imaginary sense, are his own. Thus George's life embodies a series of values close to Renoir's; his disposition towards Agnes and his capacity to find her love and their relationship a sufficient raison d'etre are unequivocally celebrated. The life of George and Agnes displays, like the work of a painter, an ability: "To create a world filled with health and colour", and is similarly beyond criticism.

Auguste Renoir as given in *Renoir my Father* is in some ways a fictional character of the status of Georges; the author confesses the subjective nature of his account, the life covers only selected aspects of the painter's experience and correlates positively with the actions and values of the fictional work. The psychology of Renoir's relationship with his father would seem to have been less than simple and perhaps some of Renoir fils' work may be understood only in those terms. I'm unsure how I would develop such an account; but in view of the remarkable

series of correspondences between events of Auguste's life and the fiction of his son, the conflict that association indicates in Jean Renoir's mind between his relationship with and apprehension of his father and his own creative life, some such account seems to be called for. What one can say is that this nexus of values and associations lies at the centre of his best and most characteristic work.

The view of life as a process, shared with his father, and a concomitant commitment to affairs of the moment rather than to other-directed pursuits, and to anti-intellectualism and celebration of the possibilities of sensual experience animates Jean Renoir's cinematic and literary œuvre. It's, I think, this disposition that inclines Renoir's characteristic generosity, tolerance and warmth to find expression in sentimentality and lack of discrimination. Just as Auguste Renoir regarded the struggle between Communards and Reactionaries as quite secondary to his personal life (he held two safe conducts, one from the commune and one from the Versailles faction) so in LA MARSEILLAISE the Royalists are as well-intentioned and almost as much a centre of value as the Revolutionaries. Bourgeois collaborators in THIS LAND IS MINE, who resist sabotage and opposition to a Nazi occupation are shown as confused, endearing and lacking in culpability for their actions.

Renoir's reluctance to impute culpability implies that actions are devoid of consequence and that any question of responsibility for action is redundant, that all actions are of equal status; this view goes with a warm regard for people—Renoir does not imply that action is derisory or futile but that all selfish, irresponsible or destructive action is either contingent or merely mistaken. His view though is emphatic rather than absolute, his best work marries a delightful recognition of the creative possibilities of experience and affirmatory view of art to a rigorous and tough minded critique and analysis of behaviour.

The differentiation I want to enforce is the one that the differences between LA GRANDE ILLUSION and LE CAPORAL EPINGLE necessitates. The earlier film comprehends an awareness and recognition of the tragic dimensions of experience, a sense of the seriousness of transience, mistakes, prejudice that the latter lacks in its sentimental celebration of universalised good intentions. Everyone in LE CAPORAL EPINGLE from German dentist's daughter to collaborating French NCO are well disposed towards each other and no culpability attaches to time-serving railwaymen, the corporal or even to Hitler.

Both *The Notebooks of Captain Georges* and *Renoir my Father* are part of Renoir's strength, they share in the qualities of the best of his work. The *Notebooks* offers an eloquent testimony to the possibility of an integrated happy and dynamic way of living and satisfyingly affirms the creative possibilities of experience whilst comprehending the tragic disruption of felicity through the intervention of dull, negative and ill-intentioned behaviour; it's not for nothing Emilien is a hardware man. *Renoir my Father* is a very affecting testament of filial love and Jean's apologia for his father's life might well stand for his own: "Great men have no other function in life except to help us to see beyond appearances".

RICHARD COLLINS

OUTLINE OF THE CZECH CINEMA

Langdon Dewey, Informantics, 1971, £1·25.

For the first time we have now all material about Czechoslovak cinema in English. Langdon Dewey's OUTLINE covers the whole history of the Czechoslovak cinema, from the beginning in 1898 till the present day divided into four periods—1. 1898–1918; 2. 1918–1930; 3. 1930–1945; and 4. 1945–1970.

As one can see the periods are not only connected with changes of æsthetic moods and styles, but also with historical and political events. In the beginning the author gives a very useful list of key dates of the history both of the Czechoslovak cinema and of Czechoslovakia as a country. Each part opens with a short summary of events which were duly reflected in the Czechoslovak cinema, e.g. the foundation of Czechoslovak Republik (1918), the Nazi occupation and the second world war (1939–1945), the Stalin—Zhdanov period (1948–1956), the New Wave (1962) and the occupation by Warsaw Pact countries (August 1968).

In the first twenty years the story of the birth of film-industry in Czechoslovakia unfolds, with six names, little known outside Czechoslovakia, but prominent at that period. The second and third periods are full of facts on directors, cameramen and actors, active at that time. There is also a short survey of film production. The most detailed description is given of the fourth period, the so-called New cinema in Czechoslovakia. This part of the OUTLINE can be compared with Nina Hibbin's reference book 'Eastern Europe' (1970) as it covers roughly the same period.

Langdon Dewey's description of New cinema is the most interesting part of the study and includes about 80 names i.e. almost twice as much material as the Czechoslovak section of Hibbin's guide (48 names). The author not only opens before us unknown pages of Czechoslovak cinema, but also gives many interesting details on film-makers dealt with, which are the more welcome, as one usually never gets them in official publications or indeed anywhere else. New facts are also given on cinéastes of the New Wave, who are comparatively well-known in the West, like Milos Forman, Vera Chytilova, Jaromil Jires and Stefan Uher. OUTLINE conveys a complete picture based on the author's expert knowledge of the whole scene. Langdon Dewey has done not only the job of a critic and a researcher, but also shown himself a competent historian of the Czechoslovak cinema. One feels only sorry that such obviously profound knowledge and the wealth of factual material have been used for a rather small reference book (122 pages) instead of serving as a basis for a large critical work on the chosen subject, which certainly would merit such an extended study. The author could have written a definitive history of this interesting chapter of world cinema (on the lines of Jay Leyda's KINO—the history of Soviet cinema—perhaps). The editing and the whole appearance of the OUTLINE might well have been better, especially considering the price of £1·25. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, this book will be of great value for every serious student of cinema, for journalists and critics and everybody who is really interested in Czechoslovak cinema.

JEANNE VRONSKAYA

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